





Her Little Highness

By Nataly von Eschstruth.

ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES FAGAN.



THE
CHOICE
SERIES
No. 109.

A Fresh Novel From the German.

WOOING A WIDOW.

FROM THE GERMAN OF
EWALD AUGUST KOENIG.

BY
MARY A. ROBINSON,
Translator of "A Child of the Parish," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES FAGAN.

12mo. 380 Pages. Handsomely Bound in Cloth. Price, \$1.25.
Paper Cover, 50 Cents.

Koenig is one of the most popular novelists of Germany, and "Wooing a Widow" is his best work. The widow in the story has more than one wooer, and there is great uncertainty as to the one ultimately to win and wed her. It is an exciting story, with a succession of interesting incidents in the working-out of an excellent plot. It is rare that we find a story from the German so well planned and so delightfully carried out. It can be read at one sitting without any feeling of fatigue, as the story is interesting from beginning to end.

For sale by all booksellers and newsdealers, or sent, postpaid, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

ROBERT BONNER'S SONS,
COR. WILLIAM AND SPRUCE STREETS, NEW YORK.

"The Wholesome Educator of Millions."

1894

Semi-Centennial Volume

THE NEW YORK LEDGER

**For Fifty Years the Leading Illustrated National Family
Weekly Paper of America.**

CONTRIBUTORS OF THE "LEDGER:"

The following gives only a partial list of the distinguished writers who will contribute to the *Ledger* during 1894:

Edward Everett Hale,
Mrs. Ballington Booth,
George Kennan,
Mary Lowe Dickinson,
Hjalmar H. Boyeson,
Helen Campbell,
John Habberton,
Washington Gladden, D. D.,
Mrs. M. A. Kidder,
Eben E. Rexford,
Elizabeth Olmis,
E. A. Robinson,

Hon. James Bryce,
Olive Thorne Miller,
Mary Kyle Dallas,
Mrs. N. S. Stowell,
Theodore Roosevelt,
Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth,
S. P. Cadman,
Hon. Thomas Dunn English,
E. Werner,
Helen V. Greyson,
Dr. Charles C. Abbott,
Prof. Felix L. Oswald.

A Four-Dollar Paper for Only TWO Dollars.

Our Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter and Fourth-of-July Numbers, with beautifully illuminated covers, will be sent without extra charge to all our subscribers.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE, \$2 A YEAR.

Free Specimen Copies on Application.

ROBERT BONNER'S SONS, Publishers,
Cor. William and Spruce Sts., New York.

A German Detective Novel.

THE TELL-TALE WATCH

(Der Lebende hat Recht.)

FROM THE GERMAN OF
GEORGE HÖCKER

BY
META DE VERE.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES FAGAN.

**12mo. 350 Pages. Handsomely Bound in Cloth. Price, \$1.00.
Paper Cover, 50 Cents.**

This story is based upon a thrilling tragedy in real life, which created a sensation in Germany, and which in the form of a novel is equally thrilling and interesting. German novels are usually quiet and domestic, and while interesting and charming, are seldom exciting or dramatic. "The Tell-Tale Watch" is both, and will satisfy the taste for a mystery which, in the beginning, seems almost unfathomable. It is a strange story with an original plot, and one which will cause difference of opinion, as the sympathy of the reader is excited in favor of one character or another. It is not a story which any one who reads will consider dull.

For sale by all booksellers and newsdealers, or sent, postpaid, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

ROBERT BONNER'S SONS,
COR. WILLIAM AND SPRUCE STREETS, NEW YORK.

HER LITTLE HIGHNESS.

HER LITTLE HIGHNESS.

A Novel

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF
NATALY VON ESCHSTRUTH,

*Author of "A Priestess of Comedy," "Countess Dynar,"
"A Princess of the Stage," etc., etc.*

BY

ELISE L. LATHROP.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES FAGAN.



NEW YORK:

ROBERT BONNER'S SONS,

PUBLISHERS.

226697

120
E74H

COPYRIGHT, 1894,
BY ROBERT BONNER'S SONS.

(All rights reserved.)



HER LITTLE HIGHNESS.

CHAPTER I.

THEY called him "Valleral." How he came by this most uncommon nickname, the old nurse who had raised Count Lankwitz's only son alone knew. In the days when she cradled little Cyprian in her arms, she had been a buxom young peasant, who knew no better lullaby for the young master than the jolly student song she heard every day in the village, with its lively refrain, "juvivallera, juvivalleralera."

"Juvivallera, juvivalleralera!" rang in little Count Cyprian's ears from morning to night. What wonder then, if the first word he lisped was not "papa" or "mamma," but an indistinct murmur, "valleral?" And when he would barely speak, he began to sing the song in merry Rosa's style. So drollingly, that his parents finally themselves called him "Little Val-

leral," and thus gave the signal for general imitation.

Petted and spoiled as only children usually are, little Valleral ruled his father's castle from garret to cellar, but in such a gay, winning manner that no one could be angry or punish him.

Cyprian, with all his mischievous pranks, was most lovable. His golden head and roguish, laughing face seemed to radiate sunshine. He was naughty through desire for amusement, not to harm or offend others; and as he was wholly lacking in fear of punishment, he always confessed his misdeeds frankly, merrily and unconcernedly, and marched triumphantly through life like a young conqueror to the refrain, "juvivallera, juvivalleralera!"

He had never been whipped. When the countess and his nurse and governess once complained too bitterly of his misdeeds, and declared to his father that he was getting beyond their control, Count Lankwitz formed the stern resolve to procure a switch, and one fine day a brand-new switch appeared in the nursery, and the parents, followed by the servants, went thither in solemn procession to explain to the child the terrible meaning of this instrument.

Cyprian already stood before the new acquisition, his hands in the pockets of his first pair of trousers, and anticipated his father's speech with the delighted query: "Thunder, papa, what is that jolly thing up there?"

The count looked very solemn.

"That is a switch!" said he with terrible emphasis.

"A switch? What is it used for?" asked his son, with a bewitching smile.

The count took it down with a somewhat unsteady hand.

"This switch is to whip with, Cyprian," he began, solemnly, but his well prepared little speech was nipped in the bud by the child's delighted exclamation:

"Valleralera!" he cried, rushed up to his amazed father, and pulled the switch from his hand. "To whip with? That is fine!" And before the horrified spectators could recover from their surprise, his little hand wielded the birch, applying it vigorously over Rosa's shoulders and back. The nurse fled, friend Valleral rushing after her, his eyes dancing with enjoyment.

The noise died away in the distance, the count and countess gazed at each other, speechless, until the mother burst into laughter, and the father sighed resignedly:

"It is a failure, Dora. The switch is there, to be sure, but Master Cyprian chooses to wield it himself."

Neudeck was a handsome old estate, but Count Lankwitz realized that in modern times a considerable fortune is needed to keep up an estate. But the fortune he could leave his son would be small, and therefore all his and his wife's hopes centered in an old uncle, little Valleral's god-father, who, they hoped, would make the child his heir. Uncle Adolf was a retired cavalry general, possessed a

large fortune, and was such a confirmed old bachelor that there seemed little fear that he, the septuagenarian, would every marry.

Uncle Adolf had announced his arrival on Cyprian's fifth birthday for a visit, and the parents had devoted their energies for weeks to drilling their unreliable little son for this momentous day. Uncle Adolf had not been favored by nature, as regarded outward charms, and was most sensitive as to his appearance and easily insulted by the faintest allusion to it.

The parents confined their efforts chiefly to preparing little Valleral to make only the most agreeable speeches to his uncle, and, contrary to their expectations, the child showed himself most obliging, and promised to treat his stern uncle most affectionately. He kept his word.

With secret delight the parents saw how lovingly the boy treated the important guest, how much taken with him Uncle Adolf was, and how the two became more and more friendly.

Guests from the neighboring estates assembled for dinner, among them the pretty, amusing, young Baroness Bohden, whom the general had already met in the capital.

He strolled with her in the shady park, holding Cyprian's little hand tight clasped in his, proud and delighted that the child was so ready and willing to accompany him, and this was due to no calculating motives on little Cyprian's part, but because the old man, with his rough caresses, pleased him, and had all the charms of novelty.

So, to the old bachelor's especial satisfaction, he insisted upon sitting beside his uncle at dinner, and as he could empty his glass of champagne right bravely with the old man, the two became more and more sociable. Uncle Adolf was never handsome, but wine flushed his face and made it ludicrously ugly.

Cyprian thought otherwise. Never before had he seen such a face; and as he admired everything about Uncle Adolf, he made use of a momentary pause in conversation, rested his hand lovingly on the general's arm, and gazed up into his face most affectionately.

"Oh, uncle!" he cried, enthusiastically. "What beautiful little bits of eyes you have! What splendid big ears! What a crimson nose and such a lovely, big mouth; you could easily put that melon in it!"

The effect of this love declaration was indescribable. Uncle Adolph sat paralyzed with astonishment; with crimson cheeks the guests gazed at their plates, or choked and coughed. Only Count and Countess Lankwitz sat pale with despair, and knew, at this moment, that the uncle's will would certainly be different from what they had hoped.

The general was and remained noticeably out of temper, rose from the table at a very early hour and departed by the first train. Valleral continued to address him lovingly, but the general was gloomy and absent-minded, and seemed scarcely to notice his little nephew's advances.

"Now, all is over! He is furious and will never

become reconciled!" sobbed the countess, and her husband sighed his assent. But they were mistaken. Nothing seemed to go wrong with merry little Valleral. On the contrary, he seemed an especial favorite of fortune, and the more rash he was, the more did she dog his footsteps.

Uncle Adolf died most suddenly, and his will made Cyprian sole heir. From the diary found among his possessions, the boy's parents learned what a blessing instead of, as they had feared, the reverse, the boy's words at dinner had proved.

On that very day, Uncle Adolf had been nearer love-making than ever before. Cyprian's tenderness, his caresses and affectionate ways, had awakened strange emotions in the solitary old bachelor's heart. An indescribable longing for what he had never possessed, for love and domestic happiness, filled him. And just in this mood, fate threw in his way Baroness Bohden, whose grace and charms had already attracted his attention in the capital, and who, in the park at Neudeck, had fairly bewitched him with her pretty coquetry.

He had taken a sudden, passionate resolution. After dinner, when wine had loosed his tongue, he would boldly venture to lay his heart, hand and—fortune at Baroness Bohden's feet.

As Alice von Bohden was penniless and dependent upon relatives, the general need have feared no refusal; but the thought of being accepted merely for his wealth tormented his sensitive heart, thirsting for love. But the girl's dark eyes gazed at him so tenderly, the red lips smiled so charmingly, and

what they said was as delightful as though Alice were talking, not to an old gray-haired invalid, but to the youngest of handsome, irresistible cavaliers. He almost persuaded himself that she really cared for him. And then—

Then came the catastrophe at the table. Cyprian's child lips truly and tenderly uttered the fatal criticism of his appearance, which did not offend the general; but the laughter, the exchange of glances among the guests wounded him deeply.

And most deeply did Alice's heartless laugh, which she barely concealed with her napkin, cut him. She fancied herself hidden by the *épergne*, from the general's sight, and did not suspect that it was she whom he watched between the flowers. Her mocking smile banished his illusions, and he saw that Alice coquetted far more with the young officer at her side than with him.

Thus his belated dream of love was blighted, and little Valleral had unconsciously carved his own fortune.

And it continued thus. There are fortunate mortals who may do what they will without ever harming themselves, and Cyprian was one of these. Careless, smiling, amusing, without being fast or dissipated, always agreeable and winning, he led a merry life, understanding admirably how to interest his governesses and tutors in anything rather than his studies.

He learned nothing, and yet knew enough to join in any conversation and to entertain people excellently with his amusing chat—a butterfly who

basked in the sunshine, delighted every eye, and was welcomed by every flower, and who yet was a careless, idle thing, without any serious object in life.

The weak parents tormented themselves with the thought that their son would never pass an examination, or have a profession, but Valleral's luck did not desert him. He was clear-headed, and the thought of wearing a handsome hussar uniform flattered his vanity. What wonder that he finally became serious at his long detention, went to work, and actually passed the necessary examination "to be rid of school books," and was admitted to the army.

The parents were overjoyed when they could at last embrace their twenty-year-old lieutenant and, Valleral, without the slightest idea of the reality of army life, departed for his new garrison in a small country town.

Subordination, service and respect were terms which conveyed no meaning to him; that a captain is a being of great importance to his youngest lieutenant, and especially in a one-company station, was something inconceivable to Cyprian, Count Lankwitz, and highly amusing to the young tyrant of Neudeck. Up to this time he had been the leader in every place that he chose to honor with his presence, and now, lo and behold, a captain appeared upon the scene, a plain Mr. von Angerschütz, who dared address him in such a manner that in his first indignation Count Cyprian declared that the disgrace of an official snub could only be wiped out with blood.

The clear-headed, agreeable first lieutenant of his company had great difficulty in making the young hothead understand the impossibility of the act; but when Valleral had been assured on all sides that a subordinate officer may not challenge his superior on account of differences in matters of drill, he good-naturedly submitted to the inevitable, for his moods were as variable as April weather, and when his honor and reputation were not concerned, he was perfectly willing to look at matters on their comical side.

The captain was not an agreeable character. The duel which his youngest lieutenant had planned had, of course, come to his ears, and he could not forgive Valleral's unheard-of arrogance. The young count who had taken all hearts by storm vexed and irritated him, and his crabbed nature now sought relief in annoying Valleral in every possible way.

But Valleral troubled himself no further in the matter. As he now knew that he was powerless against his superior in affairs of service, he shook off all annoyances with easy good nature. In all intercourse with Captain von Angerschütz, in barracks or exercise place, he was coolness personified, and this irritated his hot-headed enemy more than he suspected; but on neutral ground, in the club or society, it was Count Cyprian, the wealthy, jolly agreeable heir, who could always amuse the public as well as himself by fresh little malicious acts, which drove the captain to despair.

On this neutral ground many a bitter fight took

place, carried on, on Cyprian's part, in the best of tempers, on the captain's with ever increasing rage and many an imprudent act. This unequal conflict was watched with especial interest by the regiment.

Valleral, always affable, good company and ever ready to help a comrade, had the full sympathy of all the men, even to the colonel, whom his youngest lieutenant's tact and repartee highly amused. Angerschütz had never been popular, and many a comrade saw in Cyprian the avenger of some slight offered to himself.

Valleral occupied a bachelor apartment, very handsome for the size of the town, with stables and gardens. What wonder then if the idea suddenly occurred to him to keep a ram? Every one laughed and thought it quite *à la* Valleral that the young officer busied himself for hours with this ram; and, in fact, it was rumored that Count Lankwitz was personally training it. For what purpose? They racked their brains in vain. Was he about to surprise some little daughter of the regiment, in his well-known charming way, with a goat carriage? Very possibly.

"Hans," as the ram was called—strange to say, this was also the captain's name—was an enormous fellow, with imposing horns, and of a most pugnacious nature, which fact made all visitors to the Lankwitz garden very cautious. Yet Hans had never attacked any one.

The captain's residence was two houses further down the street, and he was obliged to pass Cyprian's gate whenever he went to the barracks. One

morning Valleral invited the two lieutenants with whom he was most intimate to breakfast ; and after the meal the three young fellows happened to be at the window just as the captain set foot in the street on his way to the barracks.

Hans, the ram, was gamboling happily in the yard when he suddenly started, and raised his head abruptly. Valleral gave a long, sharp whistle, changing into the tune, "*Gaudeamus*;" and, as though the ram had only waited for this signal, he rushed out of the gate, and at the approaching captain.

Hans advanced with lowered horns. Angerschütz sprang aside, the ram followed ; hard pressed, the captain retreated to the house steps. Hans followed after him as though bewitched, and a wild and bitter conflict ensued. Angerschütz attacked the animal with his saber ; but the ram seemed proof against blows and pricks, and sprang at his master's enemy with redoubled fury.

A crowd assembled. People screamed with laughter, while the captain's face flushed crimson with rage.

"Lankwitz, call your accursed beast off, or I will stab it. Devil take it!"

Valleral called most tenderly, while the other men almost suffocated with laughter. But it was in vain ; it seemed as though his young master's voice merely excited the ram to fresh fury.

Finally the lieutenants descended to the street, and their combined efforts succeeded in ridding the captain of his attacker.

Angerschultz trembled with rage. He read in the young fellows' faces that he could count on little sympathy from them; therefore he contented himself with making slurring remarks about a cavalry officer who had to keep a goat because he felt too insecure upon horseback, and walked off.

Lankwitz had apologized most politely, and his comrades were highly indignant at the captain's rudeness.

The next day Angerschultz rode past the gate. As though possessed with an evil spirit, the ram rushed out and attacked his horse, which, startled, shied so violently, that his unprepared rider could with difficulty keep his seat and check the runaway. He had not heard Cyprian whistle "*Gaudeamus*."

The street was filled with laughing spectators. The amusing story that Count Lankwitz's ram had taken a violent dislike to the captain interested every one, and all now began to suspect how and why the animal had been trained.

Angerschultz was beside himself with fury, and sent word to the count that unless he got rid of the ram at once he, the captain, would shoot it.

Lankwitz replied in a highly courteous note that unfortunately he could not gratify the captain's wish. The goat was the property of the circus proprietor, R., who had trained him, and who had only left him here during his absence on a business trip. Hans was an extremely intelligent and valuable animal, and it would cost the captain a considerable sum if he harmed him.

Angerschultz was noted for his miserliness. He

wrote back that he did not intend to be put to expense on the count's account, but must request the latter to keep his gate locked, that the ram could no longer annoy the passers-by. If the count did not do this he would be forced to adopt other measures.

The next day the gate was closed indeed, and in addition a huge beam placed across it, but Hans grazed peacefully in the neighboring meadow, and when the captain, smiling ironically, had passed the gate, his enemy suddenly rushed through the defective hedge and attacked that unprepared gentleman more fiercely than ever.

Angerschütz saw that the whole affair had been planned by the count to annoy him, but as he found that sly Vallerai had protected himself on all sides, and that to kill the hated ram would but cause expense and fresh unpleasantness to himself, he changed his plan. At first he tried to attack the beast with a couple of dogs, but they retreated, howling, after a few thrusts from the sharp horns of this unusual opponent, and Angerschütz only saved himself by speedy flight.

For the next few days he took a most circuitous route to the barracks, and to the regret of all the affair seemed ended.



CHAPTER II.

For some days peace prevailed in the little garrison, but it was but the calm before the storm.

The captain's eyes still flashed threateningly, and the triumphant, malicious glances he cast upon his second lieutenant would have excited distrust in any one but Cyprian Lankwitz, whose careless nature looked upon deceit as an impossibility. The owners of one of the neighboring estates had sent out invitations to a particularly promising hunt, and as Valleral was fond of all kinds of sport, he was among the hunters, while, strange to say, Captain von Angerschütz was absent. But no one missed him; on the contrary, the young officers breathed more freely not to have their superior present to act as a damper upon their spirits.

Cyprian looked so handsome in his hunting costume, and was in such high spirits, that Baroness Soldan, usually so cold and indifferent, who had driven over to call upon the daughter of the house, could scarcely turn her eyes from him.

Baroness Soldau was considered the wealthiest heiress in the whole neighborhood. An only child,

she was heiress to a large, wholly unencumbered estate, with fine coal mines, a palatial villa in the capital, and besides, a considerable amount of ready cash, which would make her large, bony hand seem highly desirable to most men.

And yet she had no visitors, strange to say, for although she was no beauty, she was far from ill-looking. Tall, very brunette, somewhat awkward in figure and manner, Bianca von Soldau gazed for the most part, right coldly, ill-humoredly and misanthropically upon the world. In spite of her twenty years, she was not young-looking, nor was she in either mind or body. Severe and pessimistic, she lived secluded as a nun, and it was said that Captain von Angerschütz was the first lover who had ever seemed to find favor in her eyes, for he was as bitter and pessimistic as the young lady herself.

It therefore excited great astonishment when Baroness Bianca had actually laughed aloud once or twice when Count Lankwitz had recently escorted her to dinner, and to-day, too, all marveled at the unfeigned interest with which her eyes followed the young hunter as often as he drew near. Unsuspecting this great distinction, Valleral made one fine shot after another, and returned victorious to dinner, where he entertained the whole table, especially the young ladies, of whom Baroness Soldau was one.

At first she had intended paying a short call only, but had remained so long that the hostess was not wrong in thinking that she would please the young lady by inviting her to remain to the hunt dinner.

Bianca accepted very gladly, and during the meal singled out Count Lankwitz for her especial attention, consisting merely in a pleasant smile and the glance of her large, beautiful eyes. Yet Valleral was teased greatly afterward about his new conquest, which amused him highly, since it made him the captain's rival.

What could be more amusing than to contest Baroness Bianca with Angerschütz, who had already believed himself almost at his goal? How furious it would make him if his gold-fish were to forsake him and turn to his enemy! Cyprian could give the avaricious man no greater blow, and his eyes danced at the thought. He proceeded to make himself most agreeable; and Baroness Soldau's cheeks, as they flushed more and more deeply, proved how well he succeeded. The flirtation was watched with amusement and looked upon merely as a new bit of malice on the part of the lieutenant, directed at his captain; for serious intentions seemed out of the question. There could not have been a more unsuited, unlike pair than Cyprian and Bianca; and besides, the youngest lieutenant, barely twenty years old, surely did not think of matrimony.

And they were right. At that time nothing was further from Count Lankwitz's thoughts, although his remarkable success with the cold Bianca flattered his vanity, and her radiant, beautiful eyes pleased him more and more.

At length the guests departed in the gayest of moods, and Valleral mounted his horse to return to his garrison.

When he rode in at his gate, his man stood on the threshold, awaiting him, with pale cheeks and disturbed air; but Valleral was in too merry a mood to notice this, threw him the reins, and entered the house.

There on the table in the sitting-room, gleaming in the lamp light, lay a couple of gold pieces. Cyprian drew nearer and glanced at them. A hundred marks! What did that mean?

He went to the stable.

"Hey, August, what is that money on the table? Where did it come from?"

August drew himself up and saluted, his face anxious, his voice hoarse.

"That is for our ram, count."

"For the ram!" Valleral's voice thundered through the low room. "Devil take you, what do you mean?"

"Does not the count know about it?" stammered the hussar, anxiously.

"I have no suspicion. Where is Hans? What has happened to my ram?"

Lankwitz threw open the door of the adjoining stable in wild excitement, and raised a lantern.

The stall was empty. No sign of Hans. The blood left the young officer's cheeks.

"What has happened to the ram, August? Has any one killed him?" he asked, from between his teeth.

The man saluted again.

"The count had scarcely left the yard this noon when the captain came with another man, and with-

out calling me, went to the stable. I suspected something wrong, and drew nearer respectfully. But the captain did not look at me, but said to the other man: 'Here is the ram. Trained for the circus. He can do all kinds of tricks. What will you give for it, Levi?'

"The dealer, whom the count knows, bargained for a long time, said that such an animal was of no value, and then they talked in a low tone, and finally came to an agreement. Levi drew out his purse and paid the captain something, and he said: 'I will add something to that so the count may have a fair price.' Then Levi tied a rope around our Hans's neck, and dragged him off, and when I tried to say something the captain snubbed me, so that I went back to the stable, for I could say nothing more. But our Hans is gone, and now—now they have perhaps already killed him, for Levi said he was in fine condition."

Valleral had listened in silence, his brow was flushed, his eyebrows contracted, betokening storm.

"Good!" said he, shortly. "Bring me a bottle of sherry, August," and he turned his back and returned to the house.

He sat there half the night, puffing wreaths of blue smoke, and drank one glass of wine after another. Finally a light dawned in his eyes, he laughed softly and raised his head triumphantly. Now he knew how to answer the captain, and went happily to bed and slept until broad daylight, for the next day was Sunday, and the captain always spent that day in the neighboring city.

This Sunday Captain von Angerschütz returned home very early, and, in accordance with his custom, made a tour of house and stables to see if all was in order.

His man's face had never had the slightest interest for the captain, nor did he notice to-day how changed it was, as the fellow silently waited to be questioned, and to-day the captain asked no questions, for he was in a very bad temper. He had called upon the parents of Baroness Soldau, and for the first time had been denied admission without reasonable excuse. And this time he had intended to ask for the hand of the lady of his choice. Could it be true, what he had heard rumored, that Lankwitz had dared interfere with his superior, and that Miss Bianca was really interested in his enemy?

A feverish unrest tormented Angerschütz. He resolved to ride out to Soldau that evening. He had counted with such certainty upon this match, that failure would be of considerable moment to him.

Followed by his man, he entered the stable, raised the lantern he carried and gazed around.

"Confound it—where are the horses?" came breathlessly from his lips. As no answer followed immediately, he turned and stared at his man. Gottlieb stood before him with shaking knees, the picture of distress.

"Fellow!" thundered Angerschütz. "What has happened to the beasts?"

"They—they—Count Lankwitz sold them to Levi this afternoon, captain," stammered the hussar.

“There are two hundred marks in on the table—”

An inarticulate cry of rage. The lantern crashed on the paved floor, the stable door banged, and Gottlieb sat alone in the dark, overwhelmed with despair, and wished that the ground would open and swallow him and Count Lankwitz.

Never had a story created such a sensation in military circles as the account of Valleral's bold act in calmly revenging himself on his captain, who had sold his goat, by selling the captain's horses.

Of course, the affair caused much talk, became serious, and passed from one official board to another, but Valleral did not worry over it. He knew that his prank was heartily laughed at and applauded, and his colonel did not look very fierce when he gravely told him that it was impossible for Count Lankwitz longer to remain in his regiment, and to be prepared for a transfer as punishment.

The young offender did so with the most charming grace, and had no fault to find with being ordered, until the matter was decided, to another squadron, where, under agreeable superiors, he led a most charming life.

Valleral had always been lucky. Why should Dame Fortune desert him now, when he had amused a whole country with his ready revenge?

The dreaded transfer came, but a loud cheer rang through the club-room, in which, for two weeks, Cyprian and his young comrades had each evening drowned their grief at parting with champagne, when, stammering with surprise, he read aloud the

ominous letter from the regimental adjutant. Transferred to the St. L. body-guard of Ulan, to one of the most elegant regiments, the most brilliant garrisons, where a ducal court resided, and his father-in-law already possessed a magnificent villa! O most delightful of colonels, to "punish" his young lieutenant thus! His ears should have rung with all the enthusiastic cheers that Valleral proposed for him.

And Cyprian's father-in-law? Ah, that was another story.

The evening that Captain von Angerschütz vainly sought his horses to honor Castle Soldau with a proposal, Valleral had sat at the feet of Baroness Bianca, and asked her laughingly if she would not think him, the youngest lieutenant, quite too bold if he already thought of matrimony.

With a deep blush, she assured him that she would think him merely very sensible.

"Brilliant! Then we are quite of one mind," he had cried, thus encouraged, seized her two cool, ugly hands, and drew them hastily to his lips, "and if you think it sensible for me to fall in love with you, Bianca, then be sensible, too, and take me."

This she had done, with radiant face, and thus at twenty, Valleral was engaged and soon married.

Over this prank, which surely was planned merely to drive the captain to desperation, people had at first gravely shaken their heads, for to engage one self merely to vex another seemed too frivolous, and they pitied the deluded girl, who surely was about to make a most unhappy marriage. Never

was a greater contrast between a couple than between gay Cyprian and the grave, misanthropical Bianca. How soon the young butterfly would tire of his plain, uninteresting wife, and neglect her—this catastrophe was awaited with true eagerness.

But they had utterly mistaken Vallerai's honest heart. If, at first, the fact that Angerschütz was driven wild at the loss of the heiress had lent a zest to his courtship, his *fiancée's* radiant happiness made a great impression upon him, and her whole manner, which expressed the tenderest, most adoring love, made him rejoice to meet her with the same tenderness. What at first was somewhat feigned, soon became reality, for Bianca's was a deep, richly gifted nature, which revealed itself in all its wealth to her husband as fully as it concealed itself from the world.

Count Lankwitz's marriage proved a most happy one, and his treatment of Bianca fairly exemplary.

After a year a son was born to the young couple, and Vallerai, the twenty-one-year-old father, was beside himself with pride and happiness. He was as much of a favorite in the new garrison as he had always been everywhere, and so all felt the deepest sympathy with the count in his great and sincere grief when, after scarcely two years of wedded life, his wife was taken from him by death. A severe inflammation of the lungs had laid her upon a sick-bed, and Cyprian tended her with unselfish devotion until her last breath, which was a blessing upon him.

With Bianca his good angel departed. His

sense of duty to her, as well as the young wife's good influence, had restrained him. Now that he was alone again, he fell back into his bachelor ways, and soon became the gay, flippant young man of former days. He became a man of the world, in the good sense of the word—always active, ready for anything, handsome, elegant and a universal favorite.

He resigned while captain, and spent most of his time in travelling, while his little son, Cyril, was brought up by his mother's parents.

The child was said strikingly to resemble his mother. His nature had from infancy proved to be unusually grave and thoughtful, and he seemed unnatural in contrast with other children of his age.

Cyril was as exemplary a child as his father had been spoiled and unruly. Cyril scarcely needed training. He obeyed without questioning, played quietly by the hour, and when he had once given a promise, held to it with a fidelity which amazed every one. He had also inherited his mother's extreme sensitiveness. Easily deeply offended, he would brood over an injury and ponder for days how to revenge himself; and he would revenge himself each time, not in a malicious or sly way, but so as so show the offender how bitterly he had wronged the boy, how unjustly he had acted.

The child was somewhat pedantic, although he had also inherited his father's talents and capabilities; for Cyril learned with the utmost ease, and took delight in writing little stories which displayed great imagination. That these were chiefly of a deeply religious and sternly moral nature surprised

the friends of the family most of all, and they could not marvel enough at the strange freak of nature which had created in father and son such absolute extremes.

As Lankwitz, senior, had been nicknamed "Valleral," some wit nicknamed the pious, grave, steady Lankwitz, junior, "Hosanna;" and this odd name was circulated widely.

But, strange to say, the relations between father and son were most affectionate, and their devotion to each other remarkable. Whoever saw the two together would think them brothers, the gay, laughing, youthful father would even have been taken for the younger, now that Cyril had grown taller than he, and his dark eyes gazed out at the world with the same look of premature age that his mother had had.

But Valleral and Hosanna wandered through life, arm in arm, in fond affection, and the older Cyril became, the more did he occupy the place of his early deceased mother, like her, acting as a beneficial restraint upon his vivacious father.





CHAPTER III.

A ball in the art gallery of the ducal castle was announced for the fifth of January.

These gallery balls were especially popular, as they were usually recruited from the most select circles of society, were never overcrowded, and gave the guests opportunity for more intimate association with their sovereign and his family than other official entertainments, where individuality was wholly lost in the assembled crowd.

The entire capital city was laid out in the most modern and elegant style, and in keeping with this frame, the ducal castle was a beautiful building—a true fairy palace of stone carvings, turrets and domes, and situated on a hill commanding a fine view of the city. The interior of the castle was also most modern and new-furnished at great expense and with exquisite taste, charming the eye where-soever it might rest.

Young life pulsed in the new castle. The reigning duke had barely passed his twenty-sixth birthday when his father's death made him ruler. Henry Augustus was a gay, active ruler, who gladly

mingled the roses of youth with laurels, and after anxious days loved to forget, by making merry feasts with congenial, amusing companions, the cares which weighed upon him since he had been placed at the head of his people and been given the task of defending them from his enemies.

Having been married three years before to a princess as pleasure-loving as beautiful, and admiring her greatly, he took pleasure in introducing more and more of the customs of her southern home into his German capital and abolishing many of the old, stiff forms of etiquette.

The other members of the ducal family were Princess Hermine, the elderly sister of the duke's dead mother, who devoted her time wholly to study, and the sovereign's only sister, many years his junior, who was the idol of the whole realm and watched by all with especial interest, as the young ruling pair had as yet no children.

Princess Rafaela was the most charming little being imaginable. Of piquant beauty, with long, floating, golden brown curls, her little figure, clad always in white, flitted like a sylph through castle and garden when the spoiled little princess succeeded in escaping from nurses and governesses.

"Good heavens, baroness, do not worry so over the princess's high spirits!" Duke Henry would say with an amused laugh, when the princess's governess would report with tears some fresh prank on the part of her young charge. "She is not made of wood, and all children romp at twelve years of age. What matter if she does make horrible faces at my



"SH! THERE SHE COMES AGAIN."—See Page 36,

guards from the castle windows. My brave grenadiers will not take it amiss; they were mischievous boys in their day. And if Rafaela finds so much pleasure in dressing her dogs in the costumes of court ladies and her governesses, then chasing them through the corridors, why, let her have her fun, and merely send me the bill for the ruined things. The ladies will surely not object to be newly dressed now and then."

Baroness Zossen was silenced, even if not convinced. She had done all that lay in her power to check the little princess's extravagances; if, therefore, the ducal pair crossed her plans, it was not her fault.

* * * * *

A court ball in the picture gallery.

Silken gowns rustle up the marble staircase, spurs and sabers clink in the brightly lighted corridors. The young people are doubly happy, for a long season of court mourning has sadly interfered with dancing, and now that it is at an end, all feel in the gayest mood.

Count Cyprian Lankwitz, who, since his last Oriental trip, has taken up his permanent residence in the capital, has donned his gay Ulan uniform, and now mounts the staircase with a look which plainly shows how gladly he comes.

"He knows the secret of perpetual youth and beauty," is said of him, for time seems to leave no traces on his slender figure and laughing face. "Valleral," the name by which he was known as the youngest lieutenant, still clings to the handsome,

retired captain, about whom nothing is old except his son.

Before one of the handsome mirrors in the domed hall, he pauses, and glances at his reflection, passing his hand over his hair as though smoothing it, but his interest is less in his own image than in the arriving ladies, who, wrapped in furs and veils, are hurrying to the dressing-room.

The count has always found it amusing to watch the beauties at an entertainment in their various metamorphoses, and see how, from a shapeless, cloaked mass in large fur shoes, will emerge a delicate creature in lace and gauze.

The old ladies and young girls look most extraordinary. The handsome, coquettish women in the renaissance age, know that corridors and stairs are as brightly lighted and crowded as the reception-rooms, and, therefore, they are arranged so that even in passing they may excite admiration.

A long sea-green velvet train rustles over the marble staircase. A woman of medium height and full, luxurious figure, with her white fur cloak thrown back over her shoulders very effectively, so that it may merely frame, not conceal her elegant figure, is the owner of this train. Involuntarily Val-leral turns. He has a whole array of different glances, and now he selects the most interesting and boldly admiring. The little foot in the tiny satin slipper pauses hesitatingly for a moment, and a hand is raised to throw the lace veil back from her face.

Not a pretty face, somewhat too fresh and round.

cheeked. But what a smile and glance! It would be impossible to say whether she bows slightly, or was it merely the veil that occasioned the movement? In any case she smiles, and then the train rustles on and disappears into the dressing-room.

Valleral's gaze follows her as the sunflower turns to the sun.

"The deuce, Vorbach! A wholly new apparition here in the palace?" says he, turning with a smile to a young officer, who comes up to him and greets him. "That lady whom I love I do not know. Who is she?"

The officer shrugs his shoulders amusedly.

*"Nie sollst du mich erfragen,
Noch wissens Sorge tragen,"*

he sang with more expression than voice.

"Who and what is she? In case she is a widow, a good *partie*. Good gracious, what diamonds!"

A lackey coughed behind the gentlemen.

Valleral hastily turned to him.

"Well, James, what is on your mind?"

The lackey eagerly drew near.

"The lady was the Baroness von Ohly-Eckhof. That is her husband yonder by that pillar, waiting for her. They have only recently been presented. I think the baron has purchased an estate near the city."

"Thanks, James. You are a good fellow—" and Lankwitz turned again to von Vorbach, and said in an undertone: "Ohly-Eckhof? It seems to me that I have heard the name before, but I cannot remember when and where. But the good James is mis-

taken about the recently purchased estate. None have passed into other hands in years. There! That fat, discontented-looking little man is the enviable husband of the diamond lady. What a mistake. I would rather accuse him of being the husband of a good cook than such a stunning-looking woman."

"Really, captain? Connoisseurs of *menus* are apt to be also gourmands of hearts."

"Sh! There she comes again. What a sweet kernel in the fur cloak shell!"

"But not pretty, captain; she is rather coarse and common-looking."

"That certainly; but that fresh style of beauty has its admirers, and I believe madam can be very amusing."

"Not to her husband. They seem quite cool and disillusionized together; she would prefer not to accept his arm, and only does so because society demands it."

"A modern marriage. Still more interesting."

"Let us follow, count! The first hearts over which she tramples shall be ours."

"Agreed!"

As usual, supper was served at small tables in the two long wings of the picture gallery. In a small niche, formed by two pillars, stood the table which Count Lankwitz had selected for his lady, himself and a young couple, of whom it was said that they were only awaiting a favorable opportunity to announce themselves to their long expectant friends as betrothed.

This evening at supper, Count Lankwitz kindly

wished to give them this opportunity, for he and his companion, Baroness Ohly-Eckhof, were so absorbed in their conversation that they had scarcely a glance for oysters and lobster, let alone their neighbors.

Baroness von Ohly unfolded her enormous green feather fan, and glanced over it coquettishly at Valleral.

“Oh, short memory, your name is Lankwitz,” said she, mockingly. “Even without knowledge of human nature, a blind man could have told from your face that you had no suspicion of what an old flame passed you in the corridor.”

“All right! Whoever beside me saw thought it was some new, young queen who conquered my heart *prima-vista*. But jesting aside, baroness, when a bowed old man like me thinks of a playmate of his youth, involuntarily he imagines her like himself, and does not dream that in modern times the tale of Ninon de l’Enclos is repeated. We have not seen each other since we were sixteen. At that time you were a bud, now I see the blossoming rose, and, good heavens, at the sight, I fairly imagine that I am a fiery young fellow still.”

“Is your son married yet?”

“O perfidious woman! Thus you destroy my illusions! My son! Yes, baroness, if you use that long fellow as measure of my age, I can not maintain my ground with you. Cyril might soon marry were he to follow his father’s example, and if you were a widow, Madame Ninon, I would send my rival on a long tour.”

"Let him stay here. My daughter will be quite as ready to listen to flattery as her mother."

"Daughter?" Lankwitz abruptly set down the champagne glass which he had just raised to his lips, and for a moment stared speechlessly at the speaker, who calmly adjusted the flowers on her corsage.

"Daughter?" he repeated, slowly. "Good heavens, since when? I never heard a syllable of it."

"You seem to have taken little interest in my life. My daughter completed seven proud years of life last month, and although her heart seems to be of straw, so that a spark would be dangerous, I will not send Mignon over the sea, but will present her to you as soon as possible at dessert."

"Mignon? Is the young lady's name Mignon? Charming! Dearest mother-in-law," the count gallantly stooped and kissed her hand, "permit me to drink to the health of my little future goddess, and pray you to assist my courtship at the proper time."

She shrugged her plump shoulders with a coquetish glance.

"I make no promises, for I cannot know whether twenty years hence my daughter will develop a taste for antiquities."

"I call that malicious."

"I call it prudent. If the 'old, bowed man' shows such a poor memory for the mother, how can he remember an offer of marriage for twenty years? Besides to return—"

"To our lobster?"

"Pardon, to your son. Where is Master Cyril now?"

Valleral laughed animatedly.

"He does not suspect how badly I am being treated at the moment, or he would come to my assistance. But, unfortunately, the military academy is an hour's ride from here, and as possibly the professors suspect what a dangerous species of mother-in-law lurks here, they strictly guard the young fellows from the dangers of a court ball."

"Very rightly. So he is a pupil at the Military Academy. Is Lankwitz, junior, as handsome and irresistible as his father?"

Cyprian gave her a bewitching look.

"Not quite so handsome, but far more agreeable than the old one."

"That will not be saying much. Apropos, I suppose that as a polite gentleman you will call at my house. Suppose, in consideration of our old friendship, I were to assume that you had already done so, and invite you and your son to dine with us day after to-morrow?"

"Then you would be most charming."

"Agreed then. And now, pray, bring me an ice."

"Not for nothing."

"Oh, oh, a tip? Then it would be cheaper for me to beckon to a waiter."

"There is none near, and the duke and his family have almost finished supper."

"Very well, then, you shall have five cents, but pray, be quick."

"Five cents?"

"It is ignoble to practice extortion upon a famishing woman. What do you wish?"

His eyes flashed mischievously, and he bent nearer.

“The kiss which is inseparable from the ice.”

Baroness von Ohly threw her head back in feigned horror.

“Shocking? You dare offer that to me, your future mother-in-law?”

Now he had the best of her.

“Offer it to you? Heaven forbid. Who thinks of a mother-in-law when kisses are in question?” said he, with a shudder.

She leaned back in her chair highly amused, the green velvet shimmered around her youthful figure, the diamonds flashed on her white neck.

“Certainly only he who has one. Those others who would gladly have one might be forced to kiss empty air. So you are modest in your demands. From whom do you ask a kiss? From my lap-dog?”

“No.”

“Alas, I have no other creature at my disposal.”

“Lovely mother! She thinks all day of her lap-dog, but not of her daughter.”

“Ah—Mignon!”

“‘No one my grief can feel, that knows not yearning.’”

The young woman shrugged her shoulders, half compassionately, half benovently.

“I am convinced that my little one, who has had to kiss so many old uncles already, would calmly pay for the portion of ice for her poor, famishing mother.”

“Excellent! Pray live but five minutes more,

baroness, until I can draw up a note for your signature." He drew out his pocket book, and hastily scratched these words on a leaf of paper: "I permit Count Cyprian von Lankwitz to kiss my daughter, Mignon." "Please sign it, Madame Minon?"

"It certainly sounds shockingly flippant, but in consideration that my daughter is but seven years old, and I am fairly feverish for want of an ice—*la voild*—signed not with blood, but a lead pencil. Mignon will be home from her boarding-school at Easter, and then you can present your note."

Valleral carefully folded the paper, and put it in his breast-pocket. His handsome face shone with mischief and triumph.

"I have no intention of doing so, mother-in-law."

"What? You will not present the note to be redeemed?"

Bending close to her, the count replied, laughingly: "The note shall certainly be redeemed, baroness, but neither at Easter nor at Whitsun, but in ten years, dearest mother-in-law, and then perhaps Mignon will not kiss the old uncle as calmly as now."

"Treachery! Shameful deceit! I shall swoon."

"Pray, wait a moment. I fly to fetch the ice." And slowly, step by step, laughing and glancing back at her, he left his companion, who was in despair at this moment that she was at a court entertainment, and so could not even shake her napkin at the most light-hearted of all cavaliers.



CHAPTER IV.

Dancing had begun again.

Count Cyprian had always been extremely fond of it, and during the first half of the ball, before supper, he had been an unwearied dancer, but after supper he was nowhere to be found. In a small room which connected the art gallery with the Japanese-room, he sat in a comfortable armchair, and stared thoughtfully at the polished floor, while his thoughts wandered far back into the past. Like a man who suddenly stands before a picture which shows him a bit of youth and home, Cyprian had gazed at Baroness Ohly's face, and all that lay between the past and this meeting again had been recalled to his mind as though by magic.

She teased him with his bad memory. Had it really become so poor in the course of years? Oh, no; after a few moments' reflection, the past rose vividly before his eyes.

Florence von Ohly, *née* von Bahrenberg. Certainly, he remembers her as a sprightly, red-cheeked, not very pretty girl, when he was introduced to her at dancing-school. She and her sister Claudine had been the least-sought-after young girls. Claudine

still plainer ; both awkward, quiet and shy as most children who have been brought up in country solitude, and then are brought in contact with strange city children.

The sisters' family affairs were sad. They had early lost their mother, not through death ; she had run away from her father, and had declared that she did so because she could no longer endure his tormenting jealousy and pessimism.

She had made various attempts to secure her children, or at least one of them, but in vain. Baron von Bahrenberg, with vengeful hate, intercepted all correspondence between mother and daughters, and even did not permit the half-grown girls to visit her death-bed.

Solitary, joyless, wholly under the influence of their embittered father, the twin sisters grew up. A compassionate aunt once made the attempt to give the poor young things some enjoyment, and invited them to spend a winter with her in the capital.

It was said that the father only gave his consent after a hot discussion, when he was given to understand that the girls were in great need of music and painting lessons, and even then, only on condition that the girls should have no intercourse with the outer world. But the aunt took them to the theatre and to a private dancing class. Florence was of a lively, enthusiastic nature ; she enjoyed these new impressions hugely, and was indescribably thankful. But the much graver and melancholy Claudine felt, with bitter mortification, how unsuited she was to

such surroundings, what a contrast there was between her and other young girls, and how she was slighted on account of her plainness.

She complained to her father, and, in high indignation, he ordered the twins home, and from that time was at enmity with the aunt. His daughters should know nothing of the world—this false, deceitful, frivolous world. They should never marry; they were too wealthy and plain. No suitor would woo them for love, and the children would be chosen for heartless, mercenary motives, as their deluded unhappy father had been.

Thus, under his influence, the young girls made a solemn compact never to marry, but always to live together on the paternal estate. Their great wealth would guarantee them a life free from care, calm, troubled by no storms of love, or the boundless misery of treachery.

This father divided his large property exactly in halves, and as the old castle was somewhat tumble-down, he built a new one for his daughters, consisting of two equal parts, divided in the center of the building by a wall. Each side was exactly like the other, even to every piece of furniture, every picture, every nail, fairly. Thus, if, when his stern oversight was lacking, the sisters should quarrel, each could have her own dwelling, and there could be no dispute in regard to possessions.

Cyprian dimly remembered that this strange arrangement had been much discussed and ridiculed at the time, and when the old man died, the daughters had been objects of much interest, and it had

been pronounced unnatural indeed when the two girls, still in their twenties, had actually lived on in cloisterlike solitude, in accordance with their father's wishes.

Then a year or so later the name of Bahrenberg was once more a subject of conversation.

Florence eloped.

The little love affair began very poetically. A young artist sat day by day in a distant part of the park and sketched the quiet lake and ducks, which were daily fed by Miss Florence. They became acquainted, and as the young lady found these meetings highly interesting, she kept the secret from her stern sister, and partly from *ennui*, partly from longing to be released from her solitude, fancied herself in love with the first young man who had ever crossed her path.

Baron Ohly, a Swede, was neither clever nor handsome, but he knew how to strike while the iron was hot, and his eyes became more speaking, his love-making more urgent, until Florence could no longer resist him. As she feared violent scenes with Claudine and her energetic opposition, she resolved to elope, and only tell her sister when she was actually married.

And so it was. Claudine von Bahrenberg looked upon her sister's flight as a piece of scandalous treachery, and obstinately refused all efforts at reconciliation. Solitary and misanthropical, she shut herself in her part of the castle. Florence received her rental quarterly from an agent, but never heard directly from her sister again.

Her careless nature was easily consoled for this; the strange, gay splendors of the world so captivated her that she gave herself up to enjoyment.

It was said that Baron Ohly had planned the whole affair very slyly to secure the wealthy heiress, and certain it was that his finances needed replenishing, for he loved an easy, material life; but although his wife soon penetrated his design, she did not take his strategy to heart. Through him she had been saved from an unbearably monotonous life, and thanks to his good name and excellent position, was everywhere received; so, since he was the most good natured of men when he had a good dinner, they lived on most amicable terms.

Live and let live. Baron von Ohly was too phlegmatic to be jealous; besides, being rightly sure of his wife's fidelity, so she might receive as much attention as she liked, it amused her so; and when Florence was amused, he always could be sure of good dinners, for the *menu* was an index to her humor.

She looked after her property herself. Her husband lived well, and asked nothing more but peace. It was, to be sure, a trial to him to accompany his wife to such long dances, but he recompensed himself at the supper-table.

So harmony ruled in the house of Ohly, and although the marriage was far from being a loving one, both parents were most sincerely devoted to their pretty little daughter, upon whom they concentrated all their tenderness.

Cyprian slowly emptied the glass of punch he held

in his hand. Yes, he had recalled it all now, and was better prepared to gaze into Madame von Ohly's mischievous, sparkling eyes. He rose to leave the room, but turned in astonishment.

"Here, young sir! It happens that the count is here quite alone," whispered a lackey, and as Valeral looked up he saw his son Cyril hesitating in the doorway.

"Papa, will you come out here in the corridor a moment?" he whispered.

"Good heavens, my boy! What on earth brings you here at a court ball at midnight?"

Instead of answering the young cadet flourished a telegram,

"What! A telegram? To you? Come in, my boy, it is absurd for me to come out in the hall. You look quite proper for a drawing-room, and besides, have a certain right to the court parquet. Come here and sit down, boy. A telegram? What can that mean?"

He took the ominous sheet very calmly, but Cyril hastily drew nearer, and said:

"The messenger has looked all over the city for you for two hours, as one of the newly engaged lackeys, who did not know you in uniform, declared that you were not here. Finally the man came to the academy, that he might at least notify me of the important contents of the telegram, and ask where you were to be found. The principal thought it safest to send me to you with the news."

Meanwhile Cyprian had read it.

"Very good, my boy. I am much obliged to you

and the director. Good heavens! Yes, all Neudeck in flames, and my poor, invalid mother taken half dead to the village tavern. Horrible! What time is it now? Twenty minutes past twelve! I can take the mail-train and be in Neudeck to-morrow morning at seven. Poor old lady, it will frighten and excite her not a little! Well, Cyril, have a glass of champagne and go back to bed. You look so fine, my boy, that I would rather present you in the drawing-room."

The speaker gazed with a proud smile at the slender yet athletic figure of his son, who towered several inches above him. He was still somewhat awkward, but the becoming uniform of the military academy made him appear very well, and as Cyril was excited, his dark eyes were unusually bright.

His face was pale, with rather large features, and not nearly so handsome as his father's. It wore a look of almost gloomy gravity, a cool, distant reserve which was usually ascribed to arrogance or ill nature, especially as Cyril had not the slightest gift for making himself agreeable. He had too little of this gift, of which his father had too much.

Now he turned to the door at his father's remark with a horrified expression, as though to enter a ballroom were something highly unpleasant.

"Thank fortune that etiquette directly forbids such a step," said he, in the dry, pedantic tone he so frequently used. "Good night, father. Give poor grandmamma a thousand greetings, and if you need my help—"

"Perhaps I will come to you, my boy, if the old

castle was too poorly insured to build a new one at your expense," laughed Lankwitz, senior. "Good night, Cyril. I trust you will get home safely."

Cyril hastily turned to go, but started back in surprise, and stood as though rooted to the ground, staring as though he saw a vision.

Through the *portières* darted a lovely, slender, girlish figure. With a giggle she rushed up to Count Cyprian and clung joyously to his arm—Princess Rafaela.





CHAPTER V.

Cyprian, too, gazed for a moment in speechless amazement at the laughing face that gazed lovingly up at him.

“Princess! How in the world do you come here in the gallery alone at this hour?” he said at length, mastering his embarrassment at her little highness’s confidential manner.

“How did I come here,” she laughed, “Mr. foolish count? Here—on my two feet,” and with unconscious coquetry, she struck out one tiny, gold embroidered slipper, over which her silk stocking hung in folds, showing that it had been put on very hastily. “On my feet, straight down the iron fire staircase. Miss Long and Madame de Claude are sleeping like tops, thank goodness. I could run away, and they would not suspect it until morning. Bah! They may make as much fuss as they like afterward. I have had my way now and that is the principal thing.”

She shook back her curls, and for the first time glanced indifferently at Cyril, who still stood mo-

tionless on the same spot, and seemed to have quite forgotten to go.

“Do you command me to inform her highness the duchess of your presence, princess?” laughed the captain, now quite master of the situation, and stooping, he kissed the little hand which still clasped his arm convulsively. “Surely you have a very important communication on your mind, little princess, that you seek an interview with their highnesses at such an unusual hour.”

“Oh, rubbish! Do not make a noise for mercy’s sake, and let my brother and Renée go on dancing. I do not want to see *them*, count.”

“Yes, but—pardon, princess, for whom is this unusual and surprising visit to the ballroom? Do you want—”

“I want to sit down most of all.” She directed the captain very decidedly toward a divan, and seated herself beside him, leaning against him so confidently that Cyprian hardly knew how to preserve a sufficiently respectful bearing. “For whom is my visit?” she continued, with bewitching *naïveté*. “For whom but you, dear Vallerai. Ha, ha, ha! What a comical expression your face wears! You are surprised that I know your nickname? Oh, I know all about you, and I have often watched you ride past the park, and once I ran and hid on the platform when you were trying new horses at the riding-school, and they made such a fuss in the castle because they could not find me. Madame de Claude is too stupid.”

Cyprian had long ago given a lackey a significant

glance, and the man had hurried off. Now the captain laughed heartily, and clasped his hands to free his arm.

“That is delicious, princess. But really I do not know how I come by the great, great distinction of being honored so—”

She hastily interrupted him.

“Good heavens, you please me. You are the very handsomest cavalier. So say Baroness von Zossen and Miss von Bahlen. And so, of course, I have fallen head over ears in love with you. I think it is lovely that you are called Valleral, and are such a gay fellow, and now I should like to see Hosanna. People say it is too funny that you and your son are such contrasts.”

Cyprian was highly amused, but he was relieved to be able to turn the alarmingly frank conversation of his little neighbor to another subject.

“My son Hosanna? It is curious that your highness has heard this absurd *bon mot*. Convince yourself as to whether we are so different. There is my son. Cyril, pay your respects to her highness.”

Rafaela slid down from the sofa, and advanced toward the young man, staring at him with wide-eyed curiosity. He did not move, except to make a slight, awkward bow. Her highness's unrestrained staring confused and pained him. He threw back his head almost rudely.

“So that is Hosanna!” said she, slowly. “H-m! I imagined him quite different; like a divinity student, with his hair smoothly parted in the middle.

What are you doing at the military academy? Are you not going to be a clergyman?"

"No!" said the young fellow shortly, roughly, and not at all respectfully.

Rafaela turned her back on him and rushed back to Cyprian, who had risen and hastily whispered something to a lackey. The man rushed off, but the guests assembled from all sides, overcome with amazement and surprise to see Princess Rafaela in the gallery after midnight.

Her little highness nodded carelessly to the wife of the court chamberlain, ignored her horrified exclamation, and turned laughingly to Cyprian.

"I like you a thousand times better, *conte mio*, and I shall tell my brother so."

"Ah, what will you tell me?" said the duke's voice behind her, and the guests drew back respectfully to make way for the royal pair.

Duchess Renée laughed aloud.

"*Mais mon Dieu, petite!* How you look! Who dressed you so remarkably? Slippers! Your frock only half fastened, and how do you come here alone without leave and at such a time?"

Duke Henry looked far more amused than angry. He took the hand of his little sister tenderly, and asked:

"You wished to tell me something, darling. Is it then so important that you choose such an unusual time to see me?"

The charming *enfant terrible* laughed.

"But, dear Henry, I had no idea of going to you or Renée."

"Not to me? Why, whom were you looking for?"

Before Cyprian could prevent it, Rafaela thrust her arm in his, and leaned against him so tenderly that he flushed crimson with embarrassment.

"My dear friend, Valleral," said she. "You must know, Hal, that I am awfully fond of him, and when I am grown up I am going to marry him."

"The deuce!" The duke roared with laughter, all the bystanders joined in, and Count Lankwitz struggled with his embarrassment, and bowed low before his sovereign.

"This latest resolution of the princess is quite as much of a surprise to me, your highness, as to my sovereign."

"I believe you, my dear Lankwitz."

"*Grace à Dieu*, the child is delicious," and Duchess Renée tried to coax the child from the count's side. "But I should think at your age there was no such hurry about your wedding that you need startle us in such a manner."

"No, *chérie*, I merely took occasion to mention that. My wish to see the count was for quite another reason."

"Aha! Then I am curious!" said the duke laughingly.

"You must know, Hal, that I know very well what Valleral thinks, does and wishes."

"Good gracious!"

"And that, because I am so fond of him. I must see that he gets what he wants."

"May we congratulate you, count?"

"You congratulate him, Hal?" Rafaela went up

to her brother, and gave him a most reproachful glance. "You, least of all, for you did not do what I asked you."

"Aha! I understand you must not ask impossibilities."

"'Impossibilities!'" echoed Rafaela, with charmin sarcasm.

But the duchess asked with interest:

"What was it, Henri? You did not tell me."

The duke shrugged his shoulders somewhat impatiently, but the little princess cried triumphantly:

"I will tell you, Renée."

"Pray be silent now, Rafaela."

But Rafaela neither noticed her brother's reproofing glance, nor did she keep silence.

"Miss von Bahlen told Baroness Zossen, the other day, that my Valleral was very depressed because at the last giving-out of orders he received no decoration. He would like the order of our house. I asked Hal right away to give the count a couple of orders, but my brother declared that could not be done, so on the spur of the moment, and as he absolutely would not be persuaded, I had to help myself."

The duke had bitten his lips somewhat vexedly, and had tried to stop the child several times. Now he looked up in surprise.

"Help yourself? What do you mean?" he asked, somewhat uneasily.

The little princess's sweet face beamed with satisfaction. The duchess exchanged a hasty glance

with her husband, and the group of spectators drew nearer. Lankwitz was on thorns.

"How will I arrange matters myself for my dear Valleral? Very simply. Here!" Her little highness raised her tightly closed hands triumphantly, and turned with an air of great magnificence to the count. "I, the Princess Rafaela, bestow upon you as many orders as you want, dear count. Unfortunately Fatty only had four, but at my next opportunity I will bring you another handful, you may depend upon it."

And the speaker forced some orders into the speechless Cyprian's hand.

"There, take them! You are not even pleased!"

"Good heavens, what a surprise!" cried the duke, half amused, half surprised. "Show me, my dear Lankwitz, what kind of chocolate medals have been lent you."

"I believe very sweet ones, indeed, your highness," laughed Cyprian, crimson with embarrassment, laying the orders in his prince's hand.

The latter glanced at them.

"What? Is it possible? Real, genuine decorations—ha, ha—our family order, the cross of the first rank—the order for twenty-five years of meritorious service and—bless me—the medal for art and science—Rafaela, child, where did you get this strange collection?"

"Did I not say so!" laughed the princess, clapping her hands with satisfaction, while the duchess cried in a tone of unmistakable delight:

"Henri, the *enfant terrible* has taken them from

their owner. Did you not hear how she bemoaned that 'Fatty' only had four?"

"Truly! Rafaela, who is 'Fatty,' and where did you get the orders?"

The delinquent laughed loudly, and pointed among the guests.

"There is Fatty! Ha, ha! Look at his face!"

All eyes were turned upon the corpulent form of old Counselor von Krachlan, who, very pale, with trembling knees, leaned against the pillar at the doorway, and glanced about confusedly. His brand-new coat presented a very unfortunate appearance. On the breast, where had been displayed a row of orders, now yawned a hole which afforded a fine view of the lining.

"Good gracious, my good Krachlan, what is the matter?" cried the duchess, bursting out laughing, and her husband laughed heartily, hurried up to him, and offered both hands.

"Poor Krachlan! You were doubtless the princess's victim. Rafaela, did you take the orders from this gentleman, and how was it possible?"

The little man bowed low before his sovereign, casting a mournful glance at her little highness. Rafaela still laughed so gayly that involuntarily all joined in.

"Why did he go to sleep? Miss von Bahlen said that after supper he always withdraws to a quiet corner and rolls up like a ball for a nap. So I made my plan accordingly. I crept away on the sly, and snip, snip, my scissors did the rest. Ha, ha! You should have seen, Hal, how he lay there and slept.

He purses up his mouth so queerly when he sleeps."

Universal merriment! Von Krachlan smiles with the air of a martyr, and mops his brow. But the duke quickly hands him back his orders.

"Here, my dear counsellor, is your stolen property. I beg your pardon most heartily, that the little princess has played you such a trick, and will, of course, be responsible"—the speaker smiled, meaningly—"that the hole in your coat shall be faultlessly repaired. Meanwhile, you have my warmest sympathy."

The counselor bowed with beaming face, and Duchess Renée too removed the handkerchief from her lips, and said a few gracious words to the old man, but Rafaela rushed for the orders.

"But Hal! You cannot do that. I gave the orders to the count, and got them for him myself. Why did Fatty go to sleep and not guard them better?"

The duke seized his sister's arm firmly, while the counselor hastily disappeared, bowing deeply.

"Now it is the count's and your turn," said the duke, in the best of humors. "I will postpone until to-morrow, Rafaela, the task of making clear to you the meaning and value of decorations. Now, as sovereign, I will sanction what a very self-willed little princess of my house has done."

The speaker turned and whispered something to a chamberlain, took from his breast the order of the ruling house, and handed it with a smile to the deeply flushed captain.

“It is, indeed, a strange time, my dear count, to give you this token of my special recognition and good will, but unfortunately my sister has anticipated my intentions, and merely hastened the carrying-out of an already formed resolution. Therefore take from the princess’s hands the decoration which I give you as one of the most faithful and devoted friends of the ducal family. *Hic aspera terrent!* We heartily hope, dear count, that you, too, will never allow unpleasantnesses to prevent you from being a true and chivalrous bearer of this order.”

Duke Henry handed the crowned star to the captain, and as the latter, deeply embarrassed and grateful, bent to kiss his hand, the duke laughingly motioned to the little princess, who stood near him with crimson cheeks and radiant eyes.

“This entire ceremony is so unusual that your thanks, too, should be of an abnormal nature, my good Lankwitz. Here, offer them to your little patroness, with whom it seems to be most advantageous to stand well. Did we not all see that my energetic sister despises no means of fulfilling a wish of her *protégé*.”

Rafaela received the kiss on her hand, accompanied by most choicely flattering words, with surprising dignity. Then she abruptly dropped her ceremonious manner, grasped Cyprian’s arm with both hands and cried, with sparkling eyes:

“Now I have gotten an order for you, and you must become a general, and then—then I will marry you.”

“Until then, I suggest that you occupy yourself with your dolls, baby. And now run back to your room. Poor Madame de Claude is in hysterics from fright, and you must atone for your most unheard-of *faux pas* to-night by double obedience and goodness.”

Duchess Renée kissed her little highness very tenderly, to atone for her “terribly severe” words, and the duke gallantly offered Rafaela his arm, which she accepted, bowing and waving her hand in all directions, and left the room, accompanied by several court ladies.

But Valleral had received an order, he himself scarcely knew how.

The unusual occurrence for a long time excited much amusement, and although one was always prepared for some eccentric prank on the part of her little highness, this surprise had been complete. The newly decorated captain became the hero of the evening, and was at once summoned by the duchess for the next galop.

He had almost forgotten the Neudeck fire in the excitement, until Baroness Ohly’s joking remark: “You really should be locked up for arson. You even set fire to the princess’s child’s heart,” recalled it to his mind, fortunately in time. The court had withdrawn. Cyprian made use of the moment, and took his leave hastily.

A lackey helped him on with his coat, and Count Lankwitz hurried down the marble staircase. The courtyard was deserted. Cyprian did not wish to disturb the old hussar, who was dozing in the vesti-

bule, so stepped out into the winter night to call his own carriage.

A form quickly appeared from behind one of the groups of statuary, and hurried up to him.

"Pardon, papa, if I disturb you once more."

"What the devil! Is it you Hosanna, or your ghost?"

The captain was in such a joyous mood that he did not notice the expression on his son's face.

"I had forgotten to ask you one more favor—"

"And did you stand out here an hour and a half for that in the cold night? What foolishness! Why did you not have me called?"

"You were in such demand."

"That of course—always—but I always have time for my boy, Cyril. But now get in here quickly, I will drive you back to the academy."

The young fellow silently obeyed, while his father hastily followed him into the carriage which meanwhile had driven up.

"And now, out with it, boy!" said he, leaning back comfortably. "What important request keeps you standing sentinel outside the castle?"

"I wanted to beg you most earnestly to take me with you. If all Neudeck burns, the old archives will be endangered. You are not much interested in them, but I am deeply. You know I am a passionate bookworm and student of heraldry, and in my opinion our archives are very valuable. So I could devote all my energies to saving them, while you cared for more interesting things."

"A good idea. You know your father. I believe,

myself, that I would have rather thrown the yellow, musty old papers in the fire than bring them out. It is a fine idea. You will be useful, my boy. Your calmness will accomplish more than my good-will, which, unfortunately, is supported by no practical talents. We will report at the academy, and then start on our way."

"I thank you a thousand times, dear father."

For awhile there was silence. Cyprian yawned heartily, and Cyril sat motionless. Suddenly he asked, in a strangely hoarse voice :

"Princess Rafaela brought you the house order, and Duke Henry has really bestowed it upon you."

Cyprian laughed very amusedly.

"*Parbleu*, I never before was in such luck. Here is the order as proof that a man must be lucky in life."

Again a short pause, then the hoarse voice asked once more :

"And the princess really loves you?"

"The sweet little thing! It really seems as though she had chosen me for her first love."

The count lighted a cigarette, his son leaning further back in the carriage to conceal his face from the bright moonlight.

"Shall you marry her some day?" Strangely enough, the words sounded as though it was with difficulty that they crossed the speaker's lips.

A burst of laughter answered him.

"Boy, you must be crazy!"

"She herself said she would marry you, and—and

there are many examples of princesses marrying courtiers."

"Certainly, but such a *mésalliance* is utterly out of the question for Rafaela."

"How so?"

"Because she is heir to the throne in case the ducal pair should have no children. The princess can marry only a prince of the blood royal, who can give the land a legitimate heir, and continue the ducal family."

A deep breath, then Cyril continued :

"Her little highness seems, from all one sees and hears of her, to be very obstinate and unreliable. And she is also undeniably very passionate, and if, when she grows older, her love grows with her, I think her capable of the most thoughtless steps. She would sacrifice land and throne for her love."

"Two are necessary for that—one who makes, and the other who accepts the sacrifice."

"Father, would you really have strength to resist her and her love?"

Cyprian laughingly shook his head.

"What an absurd idea, my boy! Rafaela is a child, and by the time she is grown—"

"In five or six years!"

"I will either have been long since married, or a burned-out crater, and have played out my role of lyric hero."

"You do not believe that yourself. A man of mature years is always more attractive to young girls, as well as clever women."

Lankwitz was highly amused.

"Listen to the philosopher!" he cried. "It will suit me very well, Cyril, if you prophesy truly."

"Then you will marry the princess?"

It sounded like a suppressed cry.

"One does not pine for stars, Cyril, and the princess will always be an unattainable star for me."

"You will fall in love with her, too."

"I do not dream of it. How did you come by such a crazy idea?"

"She is so pretty, so wonderfully pretty. I should think any man upon whom her eyes had smiled and beamed as they did upon you would be powerless to resist her charm," said the boy, very softly.

Cyprian was far too busy with his own thoughts to notice his son's strange manner.

"Yes, she is a charming little elf," said he, "but not my style. When love and tenderness are offered one they lose their charm. I have been too much loved, Cyril, to take pleasure in a delicacy served every day. Only when I must scour the woods day by day, and hunt down the white doe myself, employing every strategy, does it charm me. 'A slight demur, true love will spur,' says an old proverb, and it hits the nail on the head in my case. So answer your question by that, my son. Were Princess Rafaela later to offer me her love as openly as now when a child, it would chill my feelings, and if she keeps her passion a secret—well, then it will always remain a secret."

The young man hastily drew his hand over his brow and eyes.

"You speak only of love, papa. Are there not

cases where vanity and calculating motives determine a man's choice?"

Lankwitz suddenly grew graver. He opened the carriage door and threw away his cigarette.

"Certainly there are such cases," he nodded, "but I hope you do not reckon your father among this class of suitors. Money, rank or crown do not attract me, but only the opposition my lovemaking may encounter."

Cyril sat erect with almost passionate violence. His pale face, with the great dark, flashing eyes, was fairly uncanny.

"And if it were the opposition of the whole land, of the ruling family which, opposing your suit, placed the desired barrier in your way?"

Valleral calmly smoothed his mustache.

"That certainly might endanger very sober common sense. *Eh bien!* We will wait and see, you ambitious monkey. For the present, I promise you no princess for step-mother, but—"

"You are silent?"

"*Qui tacet consentire videtur*," laughed the count merrily. "Boy, you place the knife at my throat. But here is the academy. Sit still. Cyril, I will leave the message for the principal myself."

Cyprian threw open the carriage-door and sprang to the ground, but Cyril leaned back and a groan passed his lips. He clenched his hands, then raised his head defiantly. His pale face wore a look of gloomy, fairly hateful passion:

"*Qui tacet consentire videtur!*" he murmured. "Good, then at the right time I will not be silent."



CHAPTER VI.

Several years passed.

Captain von Lankwitz, in his gay, changeful life, scarcely noticed how quickly time flew by, and it surprised him greatly to learn, upon his return from a two years' trip to the Orient and South America, to the little German capital, that the first court ceremony after his arrival was the confirmation of Princess Rafaela.

Her little highness was but slightly changed in manner and character. The lack of a firm hand to control her became more and more evident in the course of years, and now that it was too late to influence the all too lively and self-willed princess, the ducal pair themselves became somewhat anxious.

Duchess Renée had done away with the etiquette which seemed to her so stiff and tiresome, hoping to introduce the customs of her southern home, forgetting that she had a different race of people to deal with.

For the careless, harmless, happy tone at court developed in time an unrestrained, frivolous manner of life, and the young duchess recognized with

secret anxiety that her seed threatened to grow to weeds towering above her head.

Duke Henry had of late been so occupied with affairs of state that society had little interest for him, and when he did appear at any entertainment it was only to meet his ministers and counselors.

The duchess did not venture to trouble her husband with her cares, and she herself was not energetic enough to take the matter in her own hands. It would need a firm, unrelenting hand now, and involuntarily her thoughts turned to Rafaela's future husband.

The princess had lived under no good influence. The amusing little scandals which the court ladies related without scruple had long since found their way to her ears. Her little highness was very frank and unconventional in her ideas and expressions, and as she was witty and amusing, her vivacity was peculiarly fascinating. People applauded her peculiarities, and strengthened her in her eccentric views, and the duchess soon saw that her influence could not fight against this current.

The princess sat boldly and with confidence upon the altar where the delighted crowd had enthroned her; and as no one could be angry with her or resist her fascinations, her good-natured sister-in-law was quite under the spell, although unhappy and tormented by the thought that she herself was the innocent cause of this unfortunate state of affairs.

The ducal pair's choice for Rafaela's husband had fallen upon a prince whose circumstances made him

seem especially suited to become the heir to the throne.

As commander of an army he had shown unusual ability and energy. His will was iron, so they said, and even so unbending that it bordered on relentless obstinacy. And it was this very quality which they hoped would influence Rafaela. The prince's great gravity, and the fact that he had no comprehension for people who could enjoy dancing and frivolity, was expected to furnish the balance for the princess's flippancy.

With despair, the duchess perceived that the princess, independent as ever, announced more and more plainly her intention of bestowing her hand upon her "dear Valleral."

What she had laughed at as absurd baby fancies now became a haunting fear, to be prevented at all cost.

Rafaela was not to be depended upon, and although Count Lankwitz was a sensible and faithful subject, yet on his laughing face was stamped the motto, *homo sum*.

A man like other men, vain and weak, blind and deaf to the warnings of duty and conscience, when tempted with the best that the world could offer, with the love of one of the most fascinating of women, with a princely coronet, rank, gold and honor—were not these enough to lead away the sense of the most honorable of men? And Valleral was no longer on his former firm footing. He had lived far beyond his means of late, and it was said, had gambled. Would such a man refuse the hand

of the wealthiest and most beautiful princess if she herself offered it to him.

Strategy must defeat this. It was certainly not remarkable that Duchess Renée's brother, Prince Louis Etienne, should pay her a long visit, nor did it seem strange that the lively travelled man of the world should be particularly attracted to Count Lankwitz.

Louis Etienne distinguished the captain by more and more ostentatious proofs of good will, and so it scarcely excited any astonishment when it was learned that Cyprian would accompany the prince on a South-American trip. It was quite natural. Count Lankwitz had told such amusing and exciting stories of his travels in this part of the globe, that it had made the prince desirous of taking such an agreeable and original trip. The captain would be the best and most entertaining of guides, and one hardly knew which most to envy, the prince or his companion. It was said that Valleral travelled as guest of the prince, and a year's rest would be most beneficial to his purse.

Rafaela received the news quite calmly and pleasantly. She was very lively when the count drank tea with the ducal family and a most select circle, the evening before his departure, and laughingly gave him one year's leave, but *only* one year, not a day or hour more, under pain of forfeiting her favor.

The duchess and her brother smiled to themselves.

When there was music after tea, the princess had gone out on the balcony, and ordered her *protégé*

to accompany her. The duchess followed as quickly as possible, and arrived just in time to see a rose which Rafaela had worn resting in the hand of the slightly surprised count ; but Rafaela was not at all disturbed by her sister-in-law's presence.

"You should wear the rose, Valleral," she cried, in her arbitrary way. "If I give you such a souvenir you should proudly display it to the world. Do you understand?"

He bent and kissed her little hand, with many protestations and tender thanks ; then the duke and Louis Etienne stepped out into the quiet moonlight, and conversation became general. Although Rafaela made no secret of her liking for Cyprian, at least, a declaration had been prevented.

The duchess breathed more freely when a carriage rolled over the castle drawbridge the next morning. Valleral was out of the way, and she would see that before his return the obstinate princess should wear on her finger the wedding-ring of Prince Carl Gustav.

Summer and autumn passed. Winter came, and the palace was brilliantly illuminated on the evening when the princess, now more than seventeen, and mentally mature beyond her years, was officially presented to society.

Her little highness enjoyed, with all her heart, all the festivities which followed in rapid succession, and the duchess saw with delight that Rafaela's pleasure did not seem in the least dampened by the fact that the count was not there to share these festivities with her. Nevertheless, it filled

the lady with some anxiety when Count Cyril von Lankwitz, after passing his law examination, received an appointment in the capital, and appeared in court society.

"Now we will be treated to piety," mocked Rafaela. "Hosanna will chant his psalm of morality to us, and we will don nun's garments, and follow in his footsteps. What a pity that Valleral is too far away to set the tiresome fellow right."

Nevertheless, she looked forward with undeniable interest to the entertainment at which the young count would be presented to her.

She looked more lovely than ever. The rosy gauze floated like a cloud around the graceful figure; neck and arms gleamed like white marble. The young lawyer stood before her, large, broad-shouldered, fairly overpowering in size, yet he was distinguished-looking, his manners faultless, although his coldness, like unapproachable arrogance, and his often rough frankness contrasted greatly with the smooth, conventional routine of society.

"Have you good news of Valleral?" the princess, after he was presented to her, asked, in her outspoken way, which contrasted so strangely with her ideal appearance.

The light in the young man's eyes faded. Instead of bowing he threw back his head more proudly, and her lips, which at first had smiled so ravishingly, now were pressed tightly together.

"My father seldom writes, your highness, but from the few letters I receive he seems very happy."

His voice was cold, almost ironical.

“Then has he no longing for home, for the capital and—and us?”

“Apparently not the slightest, your highness.”

The princess tossed her head angrily.

“Indeed? Is he enjoying himself so much?”

A bow, and again Cyril’s lips twitched mockingly:

“My father always lives up to the nickname by which your highness deigns to call him. He looks upon the bright side of life, takes it easily, and forgets yesterday for a pleasant to-day.”

Rafaela bit her lips vexedly.

“Are the two travellers then still in Mexico?”

“They seem loath to leave it. I have already been indiscreet enough to ask what magnet attracts them.”

Cyril spoke with strange emphasis, and the charming questioner’s eyes flashed furiously, but she laughed softly.

“Well, and has he confessed that the magnets are the beautiful Mexican women?”

“Valleral is not quite so flippant, your highness,” said Cyril, cold and stiff as a marble statue. “*One* Mexican woman suffices to capture his most susceptible heart.”

“‘Most susceptible?’” It sounded like a little angry scream. “You are right. It seems as easily captivated as cooled. All men are as fickle as April, so one cannot reproach a single one for this quality.”

“Certainly not, your highness, especially my father, who flits like a butterfly from flower to flower. As he has no intention of binding himself,

such a life full of change and harmless love of beauty is a delight to him."

Rafaela frowned, her face was slightly pale, and her eyes flashed as they rested upon the calm, polite, innocent-looking face of the speaker.

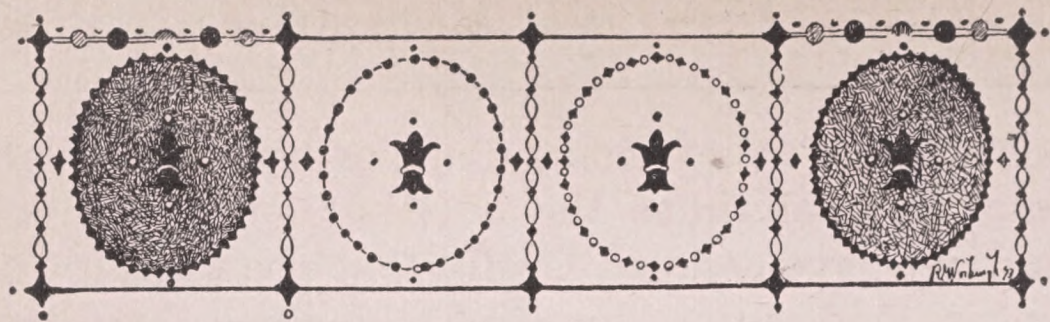
"Certainly, certainly, we would never rob him of this pleasure," said she, hastily. "We all like to be amused, I especially, and therefore I admire the motto: 'Live and let live.' When you write to the count, tell him that we are very gay here, and that fresh roses bloom when the old ones fade."

The princess said this very ungraciously, then turned and cried with flushed cheeks to the chamberlain:

"I wish to dance a galop with Mr. von Malkow."

Duchess Renée had stood near, and although apparently deeply interested in a court lady's conversation, not a word of this other had escaped her.

She scarcely believed her ears. Cyril's answers were invaluable. There could be no doubt that the young man was decidedly opposed to the well-known report that Rafaela would choose Count Lankwitz for husband. He evidently tried to prejudice the little princess against his father. This discovery was most consoling. The duchess had not counted upon this ally, and with especial graciousness she turned to Cyril, and honored him with a long, animated and most kindly chat.



CHAPTER VII.

The longer the duchess chatted with Cyril the more convinced did she become that in this uncommon young man she had found an ally for her plans.

Why the young count was so opposed to a marriage between his father and the princess was a mystery to her, for Cyril was perfectly independent, his immense fortune was unimpaired, and to be able to call a princess "mother" is surely a disadvantage to no mortal.

Mother! Perhaps that was it. The contrast between the grave, severe son, and the childish, frivolous, *naïve* "mother" would be too absurd, and it was not so strange that the serious young nobleman dreaded the curse of ridicule. But, whatever his motive, the duchess would not trouble herself, but rejoice in the fact. One Lankwitz had inspired Rafaela with a hopeless love, the other Lankwitz should cure this morbid passion.

Cyril's position at court was assured when the duchess graciously condescended to dance a quadrille with him. Rafaela, who danced opposite them, was undeniably cold, and could not display ostenta-

tiously enough the evident disfavor he found in her eyes. Several times the duchess noticed—and it could not have escaped Cyril—that the willful little princess made fun of him and whispered about him to her partner.

The young count's face flushed hotly, and his large, dark eyes flashed. This was becoming to him, and the duchess could not understand how he could be called plain. His face was far too intelligent to be ugly, although its expression would attract few. This critical, unapproachable, cold manner, which plainly indicated how foolish, shallow and uninteresting the young count thought humanity in general, would win few hearts. And yet what a flash of warm-hearted delight lighted his face when the duchess said to him very graciously :

“During your father's absence you must take his place here at court ; and as, happily, you as well as he are musical, you will surely take his part in our quartette evenings.”

This was an hour which, to all appearances, Cyril well knew how to appreciate, for the duchess was quite startled to see how much joy could beautify these cold, unfriendly features.

Cyril had none of his father's social talents. Cyprian's self-possession and *aplomb* were wholly lacking in him ; and as he did not wish to expose himself to ridicule, he held stiffly aloof from the gay throng, and watched more than he participated. His extreme youth was an excuse for this. At an age when most of his comrades were still at their studies, he had already a position, had passed his

legal examination at an unusually early age, and completed his studies with unwearied industry.

Leaning against the same pillar where, almost five years before, he had watched, with feverish pulse, the little princess decorate his father in such an unusual way, stood young Count Lankwitz this evening, and gazed thoughtfully at the gay assemblage. Many beautiful eyes met his with interest, for Cyril was not only an original, but also a very, very wealthy catch and, as such, highly desirable, however distant and unapproachable.

“Why do you not dance, my dear count?” the court chamberlain had jestingly asked him. “You devote all day to solitude and your books. In the evening the ladies have a right to you.”

He was not here for dancing. He was not here for the laughing, chattering crowd, which he already hated from principle, from all that he had heard and seen of it, and what it had made of his father and the little princess. He was here—yes, why? Cyril bit his lips, and stared gloomily at the graceful, rosy, gauze-clad form of Rafaela, who, surrounded by adoring cavaliers, jested and coquetted in her gay, thoughtless way.

There stood the answer to his question. He had come for her sake. He had been foolish enough to fancy that such a meeting again could make him happy.

“Fool, fool, fool!” jeered the violins.

Yes, he had been a fool as long as he could remember; ever since the day of Duke Henry’s marriage, when he had seen the little princess for the

first time, sitting in the open carriage, the loveliest of all princesses.

He can see her still, in her white-lace frock, with the wreath of roses in her long, floating hair. That day Cyril had bought a picture of Princess Rafaela, and had sat before it for a long, long time, his head resting on his hands, staring thoughtfully at the sweet, laughing, child face, until it seemed to live and move in the frame, and he smiled as he never had before, and kissed the face reverently, as though it were that of a saint.

And other pictures followed this first one: from year to year the collection of the princess's photographs grew, and with it Cyril's silent, rapturous admiration. Rafaela was the bright image of his life. He idealized her with all the passion of his imaginative temperament. What pain, then, when he first heard of her little highness's bold pranks, which the world laughed at and praised, but which seemed so terrible to him, since he himself had never known childish caprice. Yet she still remained his goddess, and each time he saw her his hopes that he might yet find in her the ideal of his dreams, revived; therefore, when the princess shocked him by her thoughtless manner, the fall from his heaven was the greater.

And so it was now. He was vexed that he had come. He knew that he was absolutely unsuited to the gay crowd here. He knew that Princess Rafaela loved his father, and had only wounding words and looks for him, that she was no better than all the other women he despised, and yet he came to enjoy

one passing glimpse of her, and then return more embittered and wretched than ever.

Well, at least she shall never suspect that the derided "Hosanna," with the "divinity student air," is one of the many fools whom her lovely eyes have bewitched. Love is not far removed from hatred, and this evening it seems to him that he could hate Princess Rafaela as much as since childhood he has loved her.

There she comes toward him on the arm of an adjutant. She apparently wishes to enter the Japanese room, and must pass through the doorway close beside Cyril. Her angry glance singles him out from afar. She seems again to find something ridiculous in him, a short remark convulses the young officer.

Rafaela pauses for a moment in the middle of the room, where is a statue surrounded by blooming plants. She reaches up and breaks off a twig of elder. Her arm is as white and beautifully formed as that of the Venus. Never has the young princess seemed so beautiful to Cyril. His eyes remain fixed upon her as though he were petrified; he draws a deep breath; she seems still more amused at him. She glances at him, and their eyes meet. In his at this moment she probably reads something astonishing, all his passionate, unbound admiration.

Involuntarily she raises her head abruptly, her lips part in amazement, and then curve in a slight, indescribable smile of triumph and fearful satisfaction.

Cyril sees it, and, in deep vexation with himself,

the blood rushes hotly to his face. He turns his head indifferently, coldly, with a bored air. Rafaela comes toward him on the adjutant's arm. To allow her to pass he must step aside, and does so with a stiff bow. Her gown rustles toward him; the perfume of the elder seems to soothe his excited senses; and as, contrary to his desire, he looks up, his eyes meet the princess's for the second time, so strangely that it is as though he had received an electric shock. Why does she gaze at him so? She does not feel what her eyes at this moment express. She merely wishes to see whether the "saintly Hosanna" is really as sensitive to worldly emotions as his fellowmen, whether possibly it was jealousy that made him speak before with feigned carelessness of his father's fickleness.

This thought flashes through Cyril's brain. He turns his eyes from hers to her arm, and he sees how the bit of elder drops from her hand and falls on the floor just before him.

That was intentional. For a moment the young count stands as though stunned, then angry opposition comes over him. He fathoms her purpose, and is far too proud to be made even more ridiculous in her eyes by allowing himself to be made the plaything of her whims. No, she shall not imagine that Cyril Lankwitz bows before her triumphal chariot. That secret shall remain buried in his breast.

He draws himself up as proudly and coldly as ever. His flashing eyes follow her. She pauses, chatting vivaciously, and glances back at him, at the elder.

Then she sees something astonishing. With the most indifferent air in the world, Count Cyril glances down at the elder, calmly pushes it out of the way with his foot, and walks slowly back to the gallery, without once glancing toward the Japanese room.

Rafaela stares at him speechlessly. She has turned pale with vexation. The boyish Philistine has no heart. He opposes her. He is the first, and probably will be the only one, who treads under foot a flower which fell from *her* hand.

Her dark eyes flash with passion; she does not think that there are mirrors on the gallery walls, in one of which Count Cyril reads his triumph with malicious satisfaction from her reflected angry face.

* * * * *

With noticeable favor, Count Cyril was invited to court by the duke on every occasion. Society remarked this with a certain astonishment, and could hardly understand it. It could certainly not be due to this scarcely grown young man's personality, although Duchess Renée evidently liked him, in spite of his bizarre nature. Princess Hermine, too, who received scarcely any one, had received the count, and, to every one's amazement, often invited him to her apartments.

At length the court ladies solved this riddle. Young Lankwitz was as passionate an antiquarian as the old princess, and when, several years before, at the risk of his life, he had saved the old family library from the flames which destroyed Neudeck. he had discovered some very old writings and documents which were of great value for the history of

the country which the princess had been working upon for some time. She had exchanged letters with Cyril while he was at the university, and now received him as an old friend, and soon felt a warm liking for the gifted young man, whose reserve and moodiness she judged very mildly and rightly, ascribing it to his extreme youth.

But although Princess Hermine's liking for Cyril was thus accounted for, it did not explain the remarkable favor shown him by the duke and his wife. It did not seem possible that a marriage between Rafaela and Captain Lankwitz would be countenanced; and if the princess really thought of raising Cyprian to the distinction of being her husband, she would surely treat her future step-son more pleasantly, for she made no concealment of her dislike for him! And the young count himself seemed fairly to invite the princess to fresh hostility.

Probably father and son knew their ambitious plans to be vain, and this causes the young man's unpleasant manner, while the duke and duchess try to heal this wound, decides society. The captain, too, seems convinced of the hopelessness of his efforts, for, although his year of absence has expired, he does not return.

It is rumored that Prince Carl Gustav is expected in the course of a month, and that the betrothal will follow his arrival. The development of the affair is eagerly awaited, and society is anxious to see whether Count Cyprian will really yield the field to his opponent.

The music-room of the palace is brightly lighted. The electric lights are reflected in the shining parquet floor, and the mirrors on the walls, while the little diamond crescent in Princess Rafaela's hair flashes brilliantly. A long, trailing gown of white cashmere, bordered at neck and hem with white feathers, falls in heavy folds around her graceful figure. She looks as bewitching in her simplicity as a white rose in the dew of morning.

But her manner is in striking contrast. Never has the princess hurried hither and thither so nervously, never been so restless during the music, or spoken so frivolously and mockingly as on this evening, while her eyes continuously seek, with mocking irony, the pale, grave face of Cyril, who seems interested in any one but her charming self. The few ladies to whom he speaks, unless addressed, are the Duchess Renée and Princess Hermine, who of late had honored these informal evenings with her presence.

With her, this strange young man talked with most animation and interest, while with the few others present, especially the ladies, he was as silent and tiresome as a statue, only answering when he was addressed. Princess Hermine had noticed this unnatural reserve. She summoned the young man to her side.

"Do you not like to talk, my young friend?"

"No, your highness."

"Why not? Our court is acknowledged to be rich in beautiful, charming and amusing young ladies."

"There are no amusing people for me, your highness," said Cyril in his frank way, which so often offended, "for the only theme which interests me is not suited to a drawing-room chat. To waste so many words over subjects which are most indifferent seems to me too much of a punishment. I cannot talk small talk, and modern society demands phrases and jokes which I cannot care for."

"Why, then, are you here?" asked the princess as frank as he had been. "Can you amuse yourself when you thus isolate yourself?"

"There are people, your highness," he murmured, with bowed head, "who eat, although they have no appetite, lest they starve. One can be mentally hungry. As I am in the world, I cannot wholly withdraw from it."

The princess smiled thoughtfully.

"Strange, a young man with an old head. Who has given you such ideas? You are Valleral's son. Never mind! I think you, too, will join in the world's game of chess when the queen, your true queen, appears, and makes the 'old man' a young fellow again."

"Bravo, Aunt Hermine! To be sure, I do not know what you are talking about, but if it needs a queen to make this gray-haired saint lively, here am I. Your arm, count; for the moment I order you to the service of this queen."

Rafaela bent over the princess's chair, and her dark eyes flashed very near "Hosanna," while her face wore an expression of strangely mingled mockery and feverish impatience.

The sudden flush which had risen to Cyril's face yielded to a deep pallor. He rose, bowed as stiffly and formally as ever, but the arm which he offered the little princess trembled, and his eyes flashed strangely.

Princess Hermine nodded to herself.

"His manner is unnatural. However weighty subjects his brain may be busy with, his heart is young; perhaps too young; one can see it in his eyes."

Rafaela laid her little hand firmly, fairly, imperiously upon his arm, threw back her head, and asked:

"Where are you taking me?"

He stared over her head, with lowered lashes, as though the flash of her diamond crescent dazzled him.

"I do not lead, princess, I merely obey, and follow whither you command."

Was he jesting, or did he again administer a reproof in his pedantic way? Her eyes flashed angrily again, and, like a naughty child, she clasped her hands and gazed up at him, murmuring:

"Well, then, let us wander into this little *boudoir* alone, 'with thee so late, and *tête-à-tête*' of which they tell the dreadful tale that two people once kissed each other in there—but if it seems too dreadful to you, I will send for my old nurse to chaperon you."

He set his teeth, raised his head proudly, and without a word of reply entered the little room with her.



CHAPTER VIII.

The music sounded soft and caressing in the *boudoir*. One of the guests was playing the violin most excellently. And soft and dreamy as the music were the rose-shaded lights, the perfume of narcissuses and May-bells which filled the room, while the ideal form of the princess was like a dream figure, as she noiselessly crossed the room. But the brusque way in which she freed her hand and threw herself down upon a sofa banished the nimbus; and as she looked up at him with her great passionate, angry child eyes, it seemed as though a cold wind struck Cyril's hot heart, as though it rose up in bitterness against her. He withdrew a step further and stood respectfully, but with a distant air, at her side, his grave gaze fixed upon the music-room, as though he were interested in nothing but the music.

Rafaela's little foot moved impatiently beneath her white gown.

"Well?" said she sharply.

Slowly he turned his head, and in astonishment she met his cool, blank gaze.

"Yes, your highness!"

She laughed ironically.

"Oh, yes, I forgot that you *never* have anything

to say ; that you find silence golden ; I, tiresome. Never mind ; at least you have some ability to answer questions?"

" I hope I am sufficiently well-bred to follow the dictates of good form."

She leaned back and glanced at him pityingly.

" Oh you are terribly well-bred, so well-bred that your presence always frightens me, the *enfant terrible*."

" It would then seem doubly advisable for your highness to avoid me as much as possible."

His cool self-possession made her nervous. Her eyes flashed, and although she breathed so quickly that she could scarcely speak, she tried to appear composed.

" Until now I have done so to the best of my ability, and if I try to bear the pleasure of a conversation, it is on the father's, not the son's account."

His lips twitched slightly.

" How unfortunate that my father suspects nothing of this sacrifice," he replied politely.

" You can write him of it."

" If your highness commands I will telegraph. I have little time for correspondence, and write my father only important matters."

" I never expect flattery from you, so your scarcely flattering frankness does not surprise me."

The seventeen-year-old princess spoke very condescendingly, but her charming face was flushed with anger.

" But to come to the root of the matter, have you heard from your father recently?"

“Day before yesterday, your highness.”

“Ah, since the expiration of his leave?”

“Does your highness wish me to give a report of the letter?”

She arose suddenly and looked in his eyes.

“No. I refuse your report, for—forgive my frankness”—a derisive smile displayed her white teeth—“I do not think your much tormented memory reliable enough—you might forget here and there something which is very indifferent to you but of the utmost importance to me.”

A silent bow.

As he did not answer, she continued impatiently:

“Are there secrets in the letter?”

“Certainly no state secrets.”

“May I read the letter?”

Again this unendurable stare for a moment. Rafaela was desperate. Without the quiver of an eyelash, he drew the letter from his pocket, and handed it to her, formally.

“I collect stamps myself,” said he, laconically, mockingly.

Hastily she drew the letter from its envelope, whose crest betokened the elegant writer, and without taking further notice of the address, opened it with slightly trembling fingers. The envelope fell to the ground, exhaling a delicate perfume.

Cyril leaned calmly against the wall, gazing at the face of the reader like one who somewhat maliciously awaits the development of a comedy. But Rafaela read:

“MY DEAR OLD BOY: Venezuela is a land so fair. All are burned brown who go there, and yet we calmly submit to being burned alive here in the famous Caracas, partly by the sun, partly by the celebrated beautiful eyes of the Venezuelans. My boy, what women! Even the most beautiful women of our native land are snowflakes which must melt before the ardor of the beauty and love of these! Caracas would assuredly not be to your taste, my dear preacher in a lawyer’s coat. Here it is too fragrant of jasmine and tropical roses, and there is something demoniac, seductive in these dames, which your pious young heart could not comprehend. Are we coming home soon? I doubt it. At present the cigarettes under the palms and oranges of the *patio* are far from having lost their relish, and when the beautiful, fiery-eyed women pour the wine here it becomes a draught of Lethe. One forgets everything in it. My lord and master has become quite too infatuated with the delights of Caracas. He has no idea of leaving, and as I am missing nothing, this pause in our travels suits me very well. Your accounts of our good capital actually seemed like echoes from another world. So the little princess dances, and has become a grown young lady? Well, I suppose her wedding will come off soon. I hope to be back in time for this ceremony, for the sweet little elf would look almost as lovely in bridal wreath and veil, I fancy, as *la belle Tulilta*, who sings us sweet love songs here every evening. That her little highness treats you so *en canaille* should not surprise you, my boy. For such different natures as yours could not harmonize. There is an old proverb: ‘Only in love can unlike mate with unlike.’ Well, I would not wish you a hopeless love for the little princess, and thank fortune you are far enough from it. Strange, the little thing acts upon all other men’s hearts like a spark upon powder, and only you, hardened misanthrope, remain cold as—”

The letter fell, crumpled in a ball, at Cyril’s feet. Deathly pale, with flashing eyes, Rafaela looked up at the young count.

“And you give me this—this letter?” said she, in a half-suffocated voice.

He bowed politely, coolly, without displaying the slightest excitement.

“Your highness commanded it, and as your highness doubted the reliability of my ‘poor memory,’ I must—”

She did not let him finish. With every sign of the highest displeasure, she turned her back abruptly upon him, and returned to the music-room. But Cyril stooped, picked up the letter, smoothed it in his careful, pedantic fashion, and put it in his coat-pocket.

A few minutes later he stood in his accustomed place, leaning against the door-post, looking as grave, uninterested and bored as usual. No one could judge from his cold expression what a storm raged in his heart.

He had awaited this hour, as the end of tormenting uncertainty. Now the name of Count Cyprian Lankwitz was surely forever obliterated from the princess’s heart. And his? His had never been written there; had never been more to her than an unpleasant sound, which is unnecessary to forget because it has never been remembered.

If Princess Rafaela had always been hostile to Cyril, from this hour her manner was fairly insulting. But the ducal pair did all in their power to heal the wounds her treatment inflicted, a fact which unboundedly irritated her little highness, and made her display all the more markedly her aversion to Cyril, and high in favor as the name of Lankwitz had been with her before, it was now most imprudent to mention it in her presence.

In vain did society rack its brains for the cause that had turned this love to hate, and Prince Carl Gustav's visit was now expected more confidently than ever.

The day at last arrived when the princely suitor's large form appeared in an open carriage, at the duke's side, and was welcomed with loud rejoicings.

The few select persons invited to the first gala dinner were greatly envied, and the day after there was much to talk about.

It was told that Princess Rafaela had sat like the beautiful, but wicked fairy queen at the side of her destined husband, her lovely face strangely changed. The gay, laughing, childish look was gone; an expression of sharp irony and irritableness almost robbed it of its youth. The large eyes flashed passionately and defiantly, and seemed to promise all kinds of eccentricities when once she escaped governesses and mistresses of etiquette, and won her freedom through a hated wedding-ring.

Prince Carl Gustav was her exact opposite. His heavy full beard framed a face as grave, fixed and immovable as though cast in bronze. His bearing was chivalrous, but bore the stamp of obstinacy and almost despotic severity, which was in place at the head of a regiment, but scarcely so in gay society.

As he did not care for small-talk, even though uttered by rosy lips, he chiefly conversed upon military and political subjects with the duke, who sat opposite, and did not trouble himself as to whether such unusual topics of conversation would amuse his future wife.

Rafaela leaned back in her chair, the personification of indifference, barely hiding her yawns behind her fan, and chatted freely with the gentleman on her other side, upon the tragic endings of all *marriages de convenance*.

So report rang, and the citizens shrugged their shoulders.

“He is not suited to her, he does not understand her, doubtless she will not marry him.”

But they were deceived. Three days later, beaming with satisfaction, Duke Henry announced his sister Rafaela's betrothal to Prince Carl Gustav.

A succession of brilliant festivities followed this announcement. Carl Gustav submitted to the ovations with resignation and scarcely concealed dislike, but his charming betrothed enjoyed her young life to the utmost, and was almost too gay when a telegram running as follows was received from Louis Etienne :

“We are as amazed as pleased. We had not expected so soon a betrothal in the palace. My faithful Lankwitz almost fainted with surprise. Pray send news when the wedding is to take place ; we should like to be present if possible.”

Rafaela's eyes shone strangely.

“I am willing that the marriage should be hastened in accordance with the prince's wish. Monsieur Louis Etienne and his ‘friend Lankwitz’ have overstayed their leave too long ; they will not be present at the wedding ceremony.”

This sounded like a command, not a mere hazard. Duchess Renée triumphed. The game had suc-

ceeded, and the lion's share in this favorable ending was doubtless due to Count Cyril. He should be rewarded.

The next weeks passed as though in a dream. The *modistes* worked with zeal to finish the princess's *trousseau* in the brief space of time allotted them.

They succeeded. All that the lovely bride wished to adorn herself and her home for the happy new life beginning for her was in readiness.

Many, however, doubt the happiness of this life when they see the betrothed couple together. They are not suited to each other, and Duke Henry, who laughingly declares: "Only in love can unlike mate with unlike," seems stricken with blindness. He does not see that this very love, the only possible means of reconciling such opposite traits, is wholly lacking. Already many disputes seem to arise between the couple, carried on by the seventeen-year-old Rafaela often with childish obstinacy, by the prince with a kind of forced indulgence which seems merely biding its time.

Duchess Renée ordered that the bride's train be carried by four maids-of-honor and four courtiers, not pages; and Count Cyril Lankwitz was one of those selected by her for this honor. This choice seemed justified as salve to his heart for the numerous little wounds Rafaela had inflicted.

And the hour came in which the charming princess walked out of the throne-room to take her place at the head of the procession awaiting her.

Among the orange-blossoms in her hair they had

fastened the graceful, princely coronet, flashing with jewels. The filmy lace veil hid only the back of her head, and the rich silver brocade train, bordered with ermine, and very heavy, awaited the hands which were to carry it. The beautiful face was deeply flushed, and as her angry gaze encountered Count Lankwitz it grew more crimson. She turned quickly to the mistress of ceremonies.

"Lankwitz! Lankwitz!" she cried. "I told Renée that I would not have him as train-bearer, absolutely would not. How comes he here?"

The old lady bowed respectfully before her angry princess.

"Pardon, your highness, her highness, the duchess's express command must be obeyed."

"Express command! She has no commands to give to-day!" cried Rafaela, furiously. "I am weary of this eternal tyranny. I expressly entreated the duke, as well as my sister, to see that the count was not here. Very well, excellency, if my entreaties are so little considered, I will have still less consideration for their commands."

"Good heavens, what will she do?" groaned the court lady, inwardly; but she bowed with silent resignation, with a sigh of relief. After to-day she need no longer be in constant fear and anxiety for this unreliable princess.

Cyril stood farthest away, behind the other ladies and gentlemen. His face was deathly pale, deep shadows lay beneath his dark eyes, and his face wore a pained look never seen before. When Rafaela appeared in proud splendor in the doorway, he

had involuntarily pressed his hand to his heart. But only for a moment. He gazed at her face, and drew a deep, deep breath.

What had he feared? Fool that he was, the orange-blossoms crowned no face radiant with love and happiness, but merely the brow of a poor princess who advanced to the altar, a sacrifice to her land and people. No love had wound this bridal wreath.

Deep pain, passionate pity overcome Cyril, but only for a moment. She turns toward him, looks at him. No, she does not feel what happiness this hour deprives her of! She will never miss what she has lost to-day, and she deserves no other fate.

Cyril no longer sees with the eyes of the heart but with his own cold, severely criticising eyes. Anger and bitterness awaken again within him, as he meets her angry, scornful glance. He must make a mighty effort when the court marshal's voice summons him to take his place with the other train-bearers.

Mechanically he advances toward the shining silver brocade train, follows the example of the others, stoops and raises it with his ice-cold fingers. The silk exhales a delicate perfume. It robs Cyril of his breath. He stands like a statue and closes his eyes, as though in a dream. A loud, sharp voice rouses him; he gazes straight into Rafaela's beautiful, self-willed face. The princess has turned toward him.

"Good heavens, how terribly awkward! It is fearful the way Count Lankwitz pulls on the train. You have not even talent for page. Give it here.

"I decline your services." She seized the brocade, to pull it from his hand, and for a second her feverish little hand touches his icy-cold one.

He starts suddenly, flinging the ermine border to the ground, and Rafaela also starts and draws back, gazing with wide-open eyes at his deathly pale face.

"Your highness, I will show the count," says the mistress of ceremonies, hurrying up, horrified. Too late. Count Lankwitz bows deeply, and draws back with a decision which admits of no persuasion.

"What now? Who shall take the count's place?" asks the court lady, uncertainly.

"No one!" says Rafaela, shortly, and adds with unfamiliar bitterness: "Everything about this marriage is unequal and unlike, why not also the number of train-bearers?"

The doors are thrown open. The ceremony begins.





CHAPTER IX.

Duchess Renée was not a little surprised when Count Lankwitz was seen to be missing from the train-bearers, and even the duke's face for the first time flushed with anger when his wife called his attention to the inconsiderate and insulting self-will of the princess.

But this was not the day to call the bride to account, and it seemed to the duchess that a sigh of relief passed the lips of her husband, also, at the prospect of giving the spoiled little household tyrant into firmer hands.

While Duchess Renée hastily gave a whispered command to a chamberlain to find Count Lankwitz, and detain him at any cost, telling him that it was the sincere wish of the duke and duchess, the brilliant bridal procession proceeded through the picture-gallery and winter-garden to the castle chapel.

Duke Henry and the reigning brother of the *fiancé* walked on either side of Rafaela. Renée and Carl Gustav's married sister accompanied the prince; the train-bearers completed the procession, while the guests were already assembled in the chapel.

Duke Henry was absent-minded and evidently

uneasy. Again and again his gaze sought Count Lankwitz—in vain, neither he nor the chamberlain appeared. His eyes fell upon the bride's charming face, which expressed anything but the great, true love, which is the only firm foundation of wedded happiness.

Strange thoughts, never entertained before, flashed through the sovereign's brain. Was it not terrible to give this young, lovely life into the possession of a man who had nothing in common with her, and who was bound to her by no tender ties, merely the cold, proud glitter of a princely coronet, which may unite two royal houses, but not hearts!

Poor princess, who must sacrifice love and happiness, all that remains of paradise to this world, that she may fulfill her duties to her land and people, hard, sad duties!

A crown at best is a heavy load. The duke thinks of his own words years before to the royal governess:

“What dogmatic lessons and stern reproofs will not accomplish now, the powerful mistress Love will complete. Let Love be the princess's instructress.”

Love! She does not celebrate her victory here to-day, she does not stand beside the unlike pair, to bless the bond, she is no guest at this wedding. How will it all end? How will happiness ever come to his poor, orphaned sister, whose heart beats as passionately in her breast as does that of any other woman.

Has he done rightly as a brother to bind this

seventeen-year-old child with iron chains before she has any clear idea of what bridal wreath and veil mean to a woman? As a brother? No, a thousand times no! The brother has done wrong where the sovereign has fulfilled his duty. It is a terrible conflict between heart and sense of duty.

The ceremony is ended. Smiling triumphantly as a child who has been awarded the rights of a grown person, Rafaela allows the ring to be placed on her finger. Her "yes" sounds as carelessly pleased as at some trifle, and the grave, stern man at her side glances reprovingly at the bride who is so flippant at this moment.

Duke Henry passes his fine handkerchief over his brow. The iron force of circumstances has been bowed to. Rafaela is the wife of the very prince whom policy and the interests of the land had selected. But is the passionate heart satisfied? Who will teach her that love which is to be her preceptor?

The duke's eyes suddenly brighten; he has seen Cyril's grave, calm face. As though a heavy load had been lifted from his shoulders, he draws a deep breath. It pleases him greatly that the count has not turned his back upon the palace in unappeasable rage.

Rafaela has trampled the laws of etiquette under foot, in the most rough, obstinate manner. Now something unheard-of shall occur to expiate the princess's fault. The duke smiled; the sight of Cyril has given him back his confidence and good humor.

If the Princess Rafaela's insulting treatment of Count Lankwitz had excited whispered comment, it created a true sensation when, as the bridal party left the chapel, Count Cyril was summoned to Duchess Renée's side.

Society would not wonder enough at this marvel, for although accustomed to strange departures from etiquette at Duke Henry's court, the sudden change from favor to disfavor, in which Cyril seemed to waver perpetually this day, was doubly surprising since it had been supposed that the presence of strange royal personages at such a ceremony would for once exclude all caprice. And he, the apple of discord between Rafaela and the ducal pair, how did he adapt himself to the situation?

Cool, calm and indifferent, he walked beside his royal patroness, as though he were strolling along a lonely alley, scarcely noticing what a cordial smile, what flattering interest, the duchess had for him.

He had been brilliantly recompensed. If Princess Rafaela found him too awkward to carry her train, the duchess thought him worthy to walk at her side.

The bride's face had paled with anger and displeasure, and the crowd of admirers who had long since followed her example, and treated Count Cyril most rudely, discovered fresh occasion to stand up for their princess's views.

Officially, young Lankwitz must, alas, be tolerated, for it would be rash to oppose the will of the reigning sovereign, but secretly, behind his back, no power could influence private opinion, and the princess's party condemned Count Cyril most severely.

During the wedding dinner he was very silent and indifferent, and found the *menu* far more interesting than his neighbors, whose conversation and piquant jests made him frown more and more disapprovingly.

He seemed to await with impatiencè the moment when he might withdraw. But as the guests rose from the table, a chamberlain leaned over his shoulder and whispered to him that his highness, the duke, wished to speak with him.

It was the first time that his sovereign had distinguished him by a direct conversation, and it doubly pleased Cyril's bitterly offended heart to be thus markedly honored. Possibly this had an effect upon his manner, for Duke Henry talked long and animatedly with the young man, who seemed as able to speak well as to be silent.

His frankness, often inconsiderate and bordering on roughness; his peculiarly grave views; his honest, brave heart, which more and more disclosed itself—all lent him such a pleasing originality in the eyes of the duke that he resolved to bestow more attention upon this uncut jewel.

It pleased him that Cyril frankly acknowledged that he had irritated the princess by his own manner toward her, and it pleased him still more that he declared with equal frankness that he could never change his manner to Rafaela, as their opinions were wholly different on every subject, and he was not capable of flattering where he really blamed and condemned.

Such an admission had never before been made

to the duke by mortal, and in former times it would have been rash ; but to-day the count's words found an echo in the duke's heart. He sighed heavily and drew his hand over his brow, as though the thoughts back of it pained him. Why did fate bring this strange young man in his way at so late a day? Had he been a playmate of Rafaela his influence might have been most beneficial. They might have mutually benefited each other.

Too late! Too late! Fate had laid the cards ; now the end of the game must be awaited.

But when the duke held out his hand to the count for farewell, both felt as though this quarter of an hour had been one of those brief spaces of time which unconsciously form a turning point in life, which belong to those small causes productive of great effects.





CHAPTER X.

The newly wedded pair, in accordance with the wish of the land, were to reside in Rafaela's native capital for the present, and Duke Henry had had Sophienhof, a charming palace which had been the residence of the dowager duchess, fitted up for Prince Carl Gustav and his young wife.

Sophienhof was a rococo palace of the most ideal style. Its graceful pillars, balconies and turrets rose like a fairy castle from the beautiful park, with its terraced gardens, where were fountains and hedges and bowers interspersed with white marble statues, the whole place so preserved in its original character, that one might fancy that ladies and gentlemen with powdered hair and high-heeled shoes still walked along the gay sand walks. In the rear of the castle, mysterious, winding paths led to grottoes, past stone benches, mythological figures, urns and ivy wreathed monuments and deep, green ponds, on whose surfaces floated water-lilies, while blooming shrubs bent and touched the water.

Could there be a more ideal spot for a newly

wedded pair than this castle, whose furniture, much of it unchanged for two centuries, had seen many an interesting bit of the ducal family life? The faded damask could tell many a tale of laughter, of jesting, dancing and festivities, of sighs, and many bitter tears.

Great changes had taken place in Sophienhof. At first the summer residence of its builder, one of those German princes whose ideal had been Versailles, his misfortune *à la* Versailles. The sins beautiful women had committed in these halls, the faith, belief and pure love they had derided, had soon been expiated by the deep sorrow of noble women.

Sophienhof was an ill-fated place. From the moment when its builder, the dissolute Duke August Maximilian, sank down with an apoplectic stroke in the midst of his mistresses, a champagne glass in his hand, misfortune had lurked at the threshold, and each one must learn to fear its gloomy power.

Thus, in the case of the Duchess Leontine, who, in defiance of all superstition, gave a ball in Sophienhof. Remorseless fate decreed that at this very ball, her favorite daughter, Princess Hertha rushed madly through the corridors, screaming for help, her garments ablaze, and sank down, terribly burned, before one of the guests, paralyzed as they were with fright, could spring to her assistance. And yet again, when the late duke, father of the ruling one, an enemy to superstitions, ventured to arrange a skating party on the two lakes, to be followed by a little supper and dance in Sophienhof:

The windows, usually so dark, already blazed with light; the instruments of the orchestra were being tuned; the first guest drew near.

But how! Resting on a stretcher, his bleeding head covered with an officer's coat, mortally wounded by a fall upon the ice, they bore Lieutenant von Schmehlen into Sophienhof.

Flutes and violins were hushed. All laughter died in the last sigh of a man who had dared come to Sophienhof for gayety.

And it was in this house of evil omen that the darling and only hope of the land was to enter as a radiant young bride! Society heard the news with a thrill of excitement; and the court marshal was overwhelmed with anonymous letters, containing the most urgent warnings and petitions.

The court marshal ventured a few remarks to Duke Henry concerning this, but hit upon an unfortunate hour, when his sovereign was in an ill-temper.

"Nonsense! Ridiculous!" cried the duke. "The people do not know what they want! First they desire that Prince Carl Gustav reside here with his young wife, and then some superstitious fools come with their croaks, and wish to prevent Sophienhof from being occupied. Where else can the young couple live? Say yourself, excellency, is there another suitable building? The old castle, ruined by fire, cannot be rebuilt in a night. There is no suitable villa to be purchased. Why should the ideal little palace be left to the rats? Because a few unfortunate chances have made superstitious minds

believe in the most absurd old wives' tales! Prince Carl Gustav, and the princess also, declared decidedly for the Sophienhof. I would do anything rather than attempt to dissuade one of our bravest princes from a residence there because the place is reported to be ill-omened. Therefore, excellency, have the kindness to suppress all these foolish reports to the best of your ability. For my part, I wish to be troubled no more with such nonsense."

And so it remained. The letters were thrown in the fire henceforth. The duke said nothing more about the matter, and seemed in the best of spirits; but when the young couple had gone to make their formal entrance into Prince Carl Gustav's native capital he became graver and more thoughtful, and as the hour when the pair was expected back drew nearer and nearer, his shadow was often seen behind the curtains of his study, pacing restlessly up and down.

He laughed at superstition and premonitions, yet an uncomfortable feeling tormented him—the sense of responsibility.

If it should chance that any misfortune actually occurred in Sophienhof, he would have all the blinded fatalists against him, and they would reproach him for sacrificing his sister to the evil spirit of that fatal castle.

If Duchess Sophie really wandered, a gloomy ghost, through the halls of the house in which once the deepest misery and longing for lost love and happiness had broken her heart, surely she would spare the last of her race—that tender blossom

which was to give new life to the princely race otherwise dying out. Yet, had she spared Princess Hertha? And was not she as merry and light-hearted as Rafaela!

The gloomy spirits of Sophienhof hated all mirth and happiness. If there were really truth in this belief!

In vain did the duke reason with himself and call to mind the justness of Providence. He paced his room restlessly, and fairly started when it was announced to him that Sophienhof was lighted and furnished to receive the young couple.

For a moment Duke Henry stared thoughtfully before him; then he suddenly raised his hand and commanded that Count Lankwitz be sent for at once.

The duke has not forgotten the ironic smile of the young count when Duchess Renée had recently touched vexedly upon the theme of Sophienhof and its ill name.

“You surely do not believe such tales, my dear count?” he had asked.

“No, your highness. I think them so absurd that it is incomprehensible to me that people who are sensible, cultivated, religious, can cherish such nonsense and repeat it.”

“Ah, excellent! So you are convinced that that calumniated palace will bring no fatality upon the princess and her husband?”

A strange expression crossed the young man’s face for an instant.

“Misfortune, your highness, is in the personality itself, not in the walls which surround it. It is borne

into the castle—it does not come from it. If her highness, the princess, brings happiness with her, and knows how to chain it, it will never be endangered by evil powers. God controls our destinies. No marriage, even the happiest, is proof against sorrow, and if this happens upon neutral ground, no remark is made. If it comes to Sophienhof all declare the sibyls have prophesied truly, and it is caused by ghosts and evil spirits.”

This was one of those little speeches which had once made Rafaela exclaim, mockingly: “His lips drop wisdom.” Now, too, the little group of dinner guests smiled, and bent lower over their plates; but the duke cried, approvingly:

“Bravo, my dear Lankwitz, quite my opinion!”

This had closed the short debate, and the duke had been in the best of tempers. To-day he recalled this speech, and commanded Count Cyril to accompany him. Sophienhof was brilliantly illuminated, and in company with young Lankwitz, the duke drove up to the side entrance that he might wander, unnoticed, through the rooms once more. Not a soul was in sight, and the footman sprang down from the box to ring the bell.

“Hey, Marloff, make no noise. I wish to enter unnoticed.”

“Yes, your highness.”

“Take the carriage back by the same route.”

“Yes, your highness.”

The horses dashed off, and the two men hastily entered the dimly lighted corridor.

It was quiet and deserted. The side entrance

was used only by the servants. The footsteps of the duke and his companion rang loudly on the uncarpeted floor. In two niches had been placed weather-beaten sandstone figures brought in from the park, and these seemed to stare at them with their dead eyes as they passed.

A narrow flight of stone stairs led up to more comfortable regions. A long better-lighted corridor extended before them, from which opened numerous doors with tarnished gilding. This connected the two wings of the palace.

The duke paused for a moment and gazed up a dark, winding staircase.

There was not a sound, nor was there a human being in sight.

"The unfortunate Princess Hertha once rushed, wrapped in flames, down these stairs and corridor," he whispered, drawing his hand across his brow. "Horrible! When one knows of such sad occurrences, one's imagination is doubly active. I fancy I can hear her cries for help."

"The populace are practicing cheering in front of the castle. Your highness hears the shrill voices," said Cyril in his calm way.

"Certainly, certainly, my dear Lankwitz," said the duke, walking quickly on. "Echoes deceive one so strangely in these quiet rooms. Let us inspect the suite of rooms which is intended for the royal pair and their court." He opened a door and entered. "Ah, light and comfortable, and apparently in good order. These rooms interest me less. Let us hasten to the young couple's rooms. Ah, what

tales these faded hangings and old furniture could repeat! Few gay ones. But if God wills, a new, cloudless sun has arisen for Sophienhof."

The duke paused suddenly, and stared at an old moth-eaten tapestry. A weeping, girlish face, supported on folded hands. "A broken heart," was embroidered in queer, old-fashioned letters beneath.

"Strange! Rafaela's face!" he murmured.

"The eyes are different, only the shape of the face and the way of arranging the hair remind one of the princess."

"The eyes seem different because they weep," said the duke, excitedly, and suddenly, drawing a deep breath, he turned his head from the picture. "I never wish to live to see Rafaela weep," said he with emotion.

"And why not, your highness? Tears in a woman's eyes are sacred dew to the soul. There is an obstinate, defiant kind of weeping, but that has no tears, it is merely sobs and anger. Such clear drops as fall from the lashes here in the picture, however, flow direct from the heart, and I think they can bring blessings only. The spring rain bursts the buds, and summer rain ripens the fruit."

Involuntarily the duke smiled.

"You strange philosopher! When one hears you speak, one would believe that you had been collecting your experiences of life and women for fifty years." Thoughtfully he turned to the picture again. "But you may be right. Tears are often as beneficial as the sun of love and happiness. Only

‘a broken heart’ would seem too high a price for a benefited soul.”

“Indeed, your highness?” Cyril’s young face wore a strangely gloomy expression. “How many hearts bleed without their souls being benefited! Not only love breaks a heart, but cruelty also; and I could not compare a man who dies in the arms of love, to one who is trodden under foot, misunderstood and despised.”

The duke walked on. His eyes rested on the speaker with warm interest, but he was evidently too distraught to enter into lengthy conversation upon any theme to-day. Hastily he opened a side door and entered a small, elegant little corridor, which, crossing the large main hall, led to the princess’s apartments.

Laughter, chat, the suppressed hum of conversation of the waiting crowd fell upon his ears. Two lackeys rushed down the magnificent, brilliantly lighted staircase without noticing their sovereign.

Cyril hastily threw open the doors to which the duke turned.

An intoxicating perfume of flowers met them. All was bright, rosy splendor as far as the eye could see.

The duke gazed at it with expressions of pleased approval. The doors leading out upon the middle balcony stood wide open. Two chamberlains and a court lady leaned against the bulastrade, talking eagerly; and the two men hurried past the open doorway, unseen, and entered the next room.

Large and magnificently furnished, fairly daz-

zling with its numerous crystal chandeliers, it extended before them. In the center stood a small table with covers laid for eight.

The duke started in alarm.

“Here! They have laid the first table for the young couple here! That is nonsense!” he gasped out. “There must have been some misunderstanding. Unheard of! Carl Gustav’s chair stands just on the spot where the Duke August Maximilian once sank back lifeless in his. What an indiscretion! To serve the first dinner in a room with which are connected so many gloomy memories! Can it be changed?” He hastily consulted his watch. “No, impossible, the duchess is just starting. We may expect the young couple in the briefest possible time. Let us proceed, then.”

The cheerful look had left the duke’s face, and he almost ran on.

The next room was Rafaela’s *boudoir*. In accordance with her taste, a dim twilight prevailed, and white-silk *portières* covered the folding-doors leading into the next room.

After a hasty glance of scrutiny, he turned toward them.

“In this room spring dwells, and I hope that no shadow will darken it,” said he, and at the same moment started back with an exclamation of surprise. It seemed as though a dark form arose before him, barring the way.

“It is only my shadow, your highness,” said Cyril’s calm voice at his side. And as he raised his arm, the dark shadow upon the white *portières* did the same.

The duke laughed somewhat nervously.

"By heavens, your shadow, my dear Lankwitz! The light from the window forms it. But quite startling! In a haunted castle one is always prepared for supernatural surprises." He drew his handkerchief across his brow and continued in a somewhat forced, joking manner: "So your shadow falls in the sunshine of this boudoir. I am convinced that it will only be beneficial, as the shade which in summer protects us from too great heat."

The young count bowed silently; his face wore a harsh look, and he trod under foot the little twig of myrtle which had fallen from a vase and lay on the carpet before him.

The duke walked into the other rooms. It seemed as though his restless glance no longer took in the splendor which surrounded him, but as though he gazed closely at every dark corner, to see if any evil lurked there for his darling.

And again he started slightly.

"I commanded that this room be occupied by the gentleman in waiting, and yet it has been arranged for the prince's bedroom."

Cyril shrugged his shoulders.

"I heard that his highness, Prince Carl Gustav, personally, decided upon the arrangement of the rooms."

The duke frowned gloomily.

"Then they should have tried to induce him to change. Lieutenant von Schmehlen died in this room."

"Does your highness think the room less agreeable for this reason?"

“The question is not of my feelings, my dear count. I would consider this room quite as desirable as any other, but the foolish superstitious multitude! I have already been reproached and warned by anonymous letters. It is for Rafaela’s sake. The thought that her young happiness might be disturbed distresses me, because public opinion would hold me responsible. They say that a death-room should never again be used as a sleeping-room, for the dead appears as a vampire.”

“Certainly, they say that here,” said Cyril, with a smile. “But where would be our knights, our noble patrician families, if such superstition rested on fact.”

“What do you mean?”

“When a house descends from father to son, when a residence passes into the possession of others, it would be almost unavoidable for a successor not to sleep in some room where a predecessor had died. In Neudeck, many generations have slept in the same room, and even the same bed in which father and ancestors have closed their eyes forever.”

“And from that you deduce that the dead never disturb the peace of the living?” Duke Henry looked quite contented. “Very true, and Neudeck was probably older than Sophienhof. *Allons donc*, we will not let our faith and temper be troubled by idle city gossip. I place Rafaela under the Almighty’s protection, and ask him and his angels to guard Sophienhof. Again a distant hurrah! The first cheers! Forward, my dear count! We will surprise Duchess Renée on the veranda.”

On the large balcony running along the front of the palace, the court had assembled to welcome the young couple.

Cyril availed himself of the opportunity when the ducal pair were engaged in earnest conversation, and slowly descended the steps to the shadow of a thicket, where he might remain unobserved. His heart shrank from meeting the princess, as an unwelcome guest, on the threshold of her new home, and his sensitive nature rebelled at the thought of serving as a target for her mockery and insults once more. The duke had ordered his company, therefore he had obeyed, but in the joyful excitement of the meeting he, Cyril, will not be missed ; so he may wait until the princess and her train have entered the palace, and then mingle with the other guests, in case any fresh commands are to be given him.

The people stand, crowded closely together, forming a living wall up to the very garden, that they may watch the young princess's entry. The narrow walks in the garden were crowded with ladies and gentlemen, and at the last moment, when the cheers already announced the approach of the princely pair, a tall, slight man, with an enormous bunch of roses in his hand, pushed rather inconsiderately through the promenaders. A gray travelling cloak hung loosely from his shoulders, and as he hastily passed a young lady the stranger was suddenly jerked backward, while at the same time a faint cry rang out.

"Pardon, *mademoiselle*, has the dreadful hook made me your unresisting dependent and slave?"

laughed Count Cyprian Lankwitz, bowing his sun-burned head chivalrously to the little unknown. "I always said when one hurries—oh, and it is your golden hair which chains me! Have the kindness to hold this bouquet one moment and I will set you free at once."

The young girl turned her face toward him, brightly illuminated by the electric lights, which lit up every nook and corner of the garden. It was a fresh, young, dreamy little face.

"I think you will be able to free the hook better than I," said she modestly, and took the roses.

For a moment Valleral stared at her, then hastily grasped the golden braid which was fastened to his mantle. The magnificent heavy braid was soft as silk, and for seventeen long months he had seen no such blonde hair.

"That is a superb braid!" involuntarily escaped his lips. "Good heavens, and you have two! No wonder that you ensnare men, young lady." He tried to unwind the hair, but his fingers were awkward from fear of hurting the owner.

"Miss Lola, help me!" said the young lady in perfect English, and the stiff woman's figure at her side bent down, saying, in a monotonous voice:

"Oh, yes, what's the matter?"

Her bony fingers soon succeeded in freeing the count, and while Cyprian still gazed at the golden hair as though bewitched, the young girl also cast a stolen glance at him. What a handsome, interesting-looking man. She had never seen him before. Who was he?

Then he bowed hastily and very politely to the ladies, took a crimson, velvety rose from the bouquet and handed it to the girl, saying:

“‘Yours is the victory,’ is the meaning of a red rose in the language of flowers. You were able to ensnare me as no lady ever did before, *mademoiselle*.”

He glances at her flushed face, smiles with flashing eyes, and then hurries away.

Nearer and nearer grow the cheers which greet the young couple.

The garlands and arches support many colored lanterns, flags flutter, and Bengal fire makes the streets seem even more festive. Foaming at their bits, prancing and impatient, the four horses drawing the carriage can only with difficulty be checked by the coachman, who realizes well that at the slightest yielding on his part, the fiery animals would run away.

Princess Rafaela, more charming than ever, bows and smiles in all directions, her carriage already filled with bouquets up to the knees of the occupants.

Prince Carl Gustav looks gayer than usual, but even so, his pale face looks much older than his rosy, childish wife's, and one would easily take them for father and daughter.

As the carriage turned into the park, the princess greeted the members of the court especially graciously. As the electric lights made it bright as day, faces could plainly be distinguished, and the princess's large eyes wandered impatiently in all directions, almost as though seeking some one.

When the carriage at length stopped before the castle, and, amid the thundering cheers, the duke and duchess appeared on the balcony, hurrying to meet their sister with open arms, Prince Carl Gustav, without awaiting a lackey's assistance, sprang out to help his young wife to alight.

Cyril stood motionless among the bushes, and watched the slender form of the princess as she stood up in the carriage, laughing and bowing. A great bunch of roses flew through the air, struck her shoulder, and fell down among the other bouquets in the carriage. She quickly turned her head, her eyes rested on some one, and her lovely face suddenly wore a strange expression. A hot, passionate rapture such as could be called forth in such utter lack of disguise only by great surprise. For whom was this glance—this radiant smile?

The blood rushed to Cyril's head; he stepped out from the shadow, his flashing eyes fell upon a tall man who waved his hat with the smile of a conqueror—his father!

At that moment there was a wild commotion near him. The excited horses, startled by the sudden appearance of this dark figure, shied and dashed off before the surprised coachman could check them. A short, wild rush, and then they were stopped close to the park wall; but a loud cry went up from the crowd. As though struck by lightning, Prince Carl Gustav's tall form sank down upon the gravel. Duke Henry caught the half-fainting man in his arms, and the people crowded up from all sides.

The prince had stood close to the carriage to as-

sist Rafaela, the wheel of the heavy vehicle had rolled over his foot as the horses dashed away so suddenly.

And once more rejoicings before Sophienhof were hushed in terror. Deathly pale, with great beads of sweat on his brow, Duke Henry assisted to lay the severely wounded man upon the bed which he had anxiously surveyed half an hour before.

Princess Rafaela was deeply overcome; but at the Duchess Renée's urgent entreaty, she sought her room, as she was too exhausted by the journey to endure a night-watch at a sick-bed.

The flowers faded in the carriage; the princess took but one bouquet with her, and the crimson petals which fell from it formed a track up the marble steps; they looked like drops of blood.

Deep silence brooded over the capital.

The torches and lanterns had burned out, and flags and garlands flapped mournfully in the wind, while inside the houses people talked in subdued whispers.

Prince Carl Gustav lay, pale and motionless, on his couch of pain, while the doctors hastily prepared to amputate his foot. Princess Rafaela heard the news with a horrified stare. When they permitted her to see the sufferer, she leaned over him in her lively, noisy way, kissed his forehead, and cried pityingly:

“Poor soul, how unfortunate! Now you can never dance again, you poor fellow!”

Carl Gustav compressed his lips; there were great tears in his eyes.

“I would gladly do without that, Rafaela; but I

am now a cripple; I am no longer the soldier I once was."

This grief she could not understand. As her careless, excitable nature made the all-too-young wife unsuited to a sick-room, and as her presence was more irritating than soothing to the patient, the princess was kept away as much as possible, an arrangement to which she made not the slightest objection.

"The prince is so badly suited to me," she complained to Duke Henry, always using the title prince, as though she absolutely could not accustom herself to the thought that the grave, elderly man was her husband. "He never was suited to me, but now less than ever. His sickness has made him more surly and moody than ever. If I laugh and am amused, his face blackens like a thunder-cloud. All that pleases me he calls childish nonsense, and when I am happy he is bored. I am not as old as he. I wish to enjoy my life, as he formerly enjoyed his. I did the will of you and the country, and married him. Now I have done my duty, and will be independent enough to arrange my life to suit myself."

What availed petitions and representations? Only love could smooth the diversity of this couple, and love was lacking.

Month after month passed. Once more autumn scattered its withered leaves, and the autumn storms howled over the land. Then all the bells rang out joyously. Princess Rafaela had given birth to a prince.

The young mother soon recovered, and the more

she and her baby bloomed the more did Prince Carl Gustav fade. To the perplexity of the physicians and sorrow of the people at large, the prince's leg remained stiff, and his inactive life in an invalid chair had its sad effect upon his soldier nature. He inclined to hypochondria. His relations with his wife were more and more strained, and this made him irritable and unbearable; and instead of the little prince becoming a reconciling tie between husband and wife, he estranged them, for it made Carl Gustav bitter almost to hatred that his vivacious wife displayed no interest in the nursery, but again thought she had done her duty in giving to the land the ardently desired heir.

"Misfortune does not dwell within walls, it is brought in by men themselves." The words still rang like a mournful echo in Duke Henry's mind. Yes, unhappiness had this time been carried into Sophienhof, and it remained there. Princess Rafaela might light the castle ever so brightly for dance and feast, it yet remained dark and sad; for the star of love and happiness did not watch over it.





CHAPTER XI.

A sad state of affairs prevailed in the capital. Princess Rafaela was still far too young and undisciplined, too petted and willful, to be independent. To oppose all prudence and authority, she behaved in a manner which more and more incurred the severe blame of all serious persons.

Duke Henry and Duchess Renée condemned her conduct severely, and yet they could bring about no change, for Rafaela opposed them from principle, declaring that she would no longer be dictated to, and her husband, that she might not be tyrannized over.

And yet there was no one but him who had the right and the courage to open the young wife's eyes to herself and her conduct.

Duke Henry, usually so active and energetic, could not, even now, overcome the weakness he had always had for his sister. He worried, but could not resolve to act with the requisite energy as sovereign of the land and head of his family.

Duchess Renée had quarreled with her sister-in-law. She avoided Rafaela's entertainments, and

openly sided with Prince Carl Gustav, who was slowly and hopelessly dying by inches. This gave the signal for a division in society, and two parties were formed, as bitterly opposed to each other as pettiness and intolerance usually effect.

All the gay, and, also, unfortunately, the dissolute elements sided with Princess Rafaela, who lacked enough experience and knowledge of human nature to see that this was the case, and that the better members of society ostentatiously were of the ducal pair's party.

The only gay butterfly who flew impartially from one party to the other was Count Cyprian Lankwitz, the very man whose name was most on people's lips when Princess Rafaela was criticised. Valleral was a master in the difficult art of avoiding dangerous rocks. He steered hither and thither, and he, the rock of offense, remained neutral, and with an amused smile, watched this tempest in a tea-pot, chiefly on his account.

He, the handsome, mature, satiated man, would not be bound, either by Rafaela's fascinations, or the kind efforts of the duke to win him to the palace, and estrange him from Sophienhof. He gave no occasion for just reproach. With a shrug of his shoulders he let the princess rave over him, and laughingly gave her to understand that it was a Danaide task to try to kindle a burned-out crater. He coquetted with his gray hairs, and yet was flattered and pleased that, in spite of them, he was able to inspire a passion which excited a whole land. He tolerated Rafaela's marks of favor with a humor

which tried to represent this "passion for an old man" in the most harmless light possible.

His amusing flippancy made him everywhere welcome, and much as her little highness pouted that he was as much at home in the palace as in Sophienhof, did the duke rejoice that, owing to frequent intercourse with the count, he might have a certain influence over him.

There were various opinions as to whether Princess Rafaela had really returned to her old love, or merely feigned so from caprice. There were even some who declared that she singled out Cyprian for so many marks of distinction merely to irritate his son. It was said that at first she had tried to attract Cyril to her palace in order to single out the captain for all the more favors, and snub the young lawyer most ostentatiously.

She had succeeded but poorly. It was difficult to understand why she should take the trouble to annoy Count Cyril, for nothing seemed further from his thoughts than Sophienhof. The young misanthrope had almost wholly withdrawn from society; he was seen neither in drawing-rooms nor club; and his father, when questioned concerning him, would reply laughingly that his unnatural son was up to his ears in study, and seriously objected to being disturbed by even the briefest and most amusing account of social life. The outer world was dead for him, and if this indifference annoyed any one it was the princess.

The only intercourse which Cyril still cultivated was in the palace with Princess Hermine, whom he

still visited quite frequently, participating in her studies. His profession often brought him in contact with the duke, and their little discussions of affairs of the day often ended with the sovereign remarking smilingly :

“You really are most suited to diplomacy, my dear Lankwitz. You are cold-blooded, keen and incredibly distrustful. You have a genius for being either an *attaché* or member of the secret police.”

Thus nearly two years had passed. Princess Rafaela saw nothing of the young count, and gradually accustomed herself to be ignored by him. She was often in a very bad temper, and her court had to suffer much from her, especially poor Valleral, who was treated to the most abrupt changes of love to hatred.

Without the slightest result, Count Cyprian laughed at both, and no one could pass through hailstorms or sunshine as securely as he, the idler, who lived more extravagantly each year, and astonished the world by the new order of affairs, the son paying the father's debts.

Scandal became more and more busy with Sophienhof. The princess's manner to her husband was sharply criticised. Her relation with Captain Lankwitz was openly discussed, and she was bitterly reproached with being a faithless wife and mother.

The sympathy she formerly enjoyed died away more and more, as her breach with the ducal pair became more apparent, and it was even rumored that the duke seriously thought of putting the young princess under strict guardianship ; to do which the

prince's more and more deplorable condition gave him a right.

Then something most unexpected occurred. A book appeared which excited the whole civilized world.

It's title was "The modern Madam Potiphar," and its contents were an unmistakable reflection of the state of affairs in Sophienhof, in which Madam Potiphar held her dissolute court. There was not an unjust or superfluous word. The treatment of her dying husband by Madam Potiphar found no excuse, either in her youth, nor the reasons for which the marriage had been made. A woman who was so lacking in pity and sympathy that she could thus neglect a dying man, and boldly display her love for another, is so shallow, so contemptible that she judges and condemns herself.

And Madam Potiphar was no better as a mother; her child did not exist for her. She lived only for herself, for dancing and amusement; childish defiance and obstinacy dictated her every action; she quarreled with those who meant most kindly with her; she repaid with ingratitude and heartlessness all the love which, since her childhood, her family had shown her.

All this was truth—bitter, relentless truth. In Madam Potiphar's favorite, Count Cyprian Lankwitz was to be easily recognized. His nickname, Vaileral, was changed to Vauxrien. He fared none too well in the book, and his manner of life was severely criticised, but it was admitted that, despite his frivolity, he had remained a chaste Joseph to Madam

Potiphar, and had left the mantle in her hands, and fled to his misanthropical son, the hermit. It was chiefly the latter's influence, which enabled the father to resist the allurements of his beautiful temptress.

Most of the frequenters of Sophienhof are plainly designated. The whole book was clever, satirical, and elegant in language, but not malicious. The few good traits of its characters were frankly admitted.

Who was the author? The whole capital was interested in this question. The book was published in Paris, and appeared in perfect French as well as German, but anonymously. It was circulated not only throughout the capital, but also in all the large cities of Europe, where it created much talk.

Who was the author? He must be quite at home in Sophienhof; he must be a man of uncommon sharpness, or a lady of remarkable intellect. Opinions as to the sex differed. "Only a woman's pen could be so malicious, could enter so accurately into detail," said some. "Only a man, and an unusually gifted man, could be so logical and philosophical," said others.

Excitement was at the highest pitch in the capital, and all were most anxious to learn how this bold production would be received at the court itself.

The red silk curtains of Duke Henry's study were closely drawn. The sunlight shining through them was reflected in the crystal ornaments on the broad writing-table, before which sat the duke, calm and

pleasant as ever, listening to a report from Count Cyril, whom he had summoned to his presence. Before him, on the table lay the fatal book—"Madam Potiphar"—and the hand which rested upon it was as steady as though the firebrand which these pages had kindled did not concern him or his in the slightest.

"So your secret investigations in book stores and with the police were without result, my dear count?"

Cyril bowed.

"The hopes which they could hold out to me of discovering the author were so vague that they seem vain. But it is possible, your highness, that I am particularly ill suited to the mission with which your highness has honored me. I beg you as urgently as respectfully to choose some clever and renowned man who may undertake my unsuccessful expedition with better results."

The duke smilingly shook his head.

"That would be a useless waste of time. I do not seek to discover the anonymous author that I may call him to account, but to make the acquaintance of a man who has hitherto hid his light under a bushel, and who is worth discovery. However, I am not curious, and will try to pierce no disguise. Let Princess Rafaela first express her wish in the matter."

The speaker was silent for a moment, and thoughtfully turned the pages of the book. Then he suddenly gazed into the count's grave, immovable face.

"Have you read the book yet, Lankwitz?"

"Yes, your highness."

"Tell me frankly what impression did it make upon you?"

Cyril's eyes met those of his sovereign frankly and fearlessly.

"Your highness knows my views of the world and mankind. The author of this book seems to be as eccentric as I, for he has written my very thoughts."

The duke laughed softly.

"If the name Lankwitz were not mentioned too compromisingly in the book, I would believe, my dear count, that it was a *resumé* of your dark thoughts. But joking aside, to think, write and *publish* are different matters. Do you think the author a gentleman of our circle?"

The young man's face wore a gloomy look.

"He has certainly forfeited such a position now."

"How so? In spite of extreme frankness, the book is decent and refined. It contains mere truths, alas. Certainly it is to be doubted whether a friend of our house would so remorselessly proclaim the truth to all the world. I therefore ascribe it to an enemy as bitter as irreconcilable."

Cyril's eyes flashed.

"Probably only an enemy of Princess Rafaela and my father," he murmured between his teeth.

"Of your father?"

"He is described as a mocking Joseph. Must not that endanger his position in Sophienhof as well as in the palace here?" There was an eager, almost anxious tone in the questioner's voice.

“In Sophienhof, possibly. At least I shall personally do all in my power to persuade the princess to banish from her presence a man with whom public opinion so fatally connects her name. But the modern Joseph shall not be thrown into a dungeon, but rather be a more frequent guest in our palace. And now, my dear count, be again to-day my friendly companion on a secret visit to Sophienhof, as you were on that unfortunate evening when we expected the young couple.”

The duke was staring thoughtfully before him, and did not notice the count's start or the changing flush and pallor of his face. He rose quickly, and put the copy of “*Madame Potiphar*” in his pocket.

“I think it my duty to go in person to Sophienhof to-day to speak with the princess concerning this book.” He drew a deep breath, and then the following words seemed to escape his lips involuntarily: “God grant that it may have a good influence upon her. It seems to me that these pitiless pages must bear noble fruit, and as though at the head of this hostile attack were the inscription, ‘You thought to do harm, but God has made you beneficial.’ Come, my dear count. I do not care that the public should discuss my visit to Sophienhof prematurely, therefore I take you with me, because I know that you will keep silence. I will not take a carriage, but go through the park by a quiet, solitary path with which possibly you are not yet acquainted.”

He held out his hand, and did not notice that the young man drew it to his hot, quivering lips in un-

usual excitement; then he turned and hastily summoned his valet.

The park was in all the beauty of young spring as the two men walked along in silence, both absorbed in thought. Sophienhof, despite the late hour, seemed still asleep. The white curtains were drawn before the windows behind which Princess Rafaela had yesterday participated in private theatricals and dancing. A carriage, that of the physician who visited poor Prince Carl Gustav each day, stood waiting before the door. The coachman was chatting with two sleepy lackeys.

"Will you have the kindness, my dear count, to announce my visit to the prince, shortly," said the duke, turning to his companion after a long silence. "I should like to enter once more unseen, by the side door. You will make use of the main entrance, if you please, and take all possible care that the servants know nothing of my presence for the present."

Cyril bowed, waited until the duke had turned into a path leading to the side door, and then slowly crossed the open place in front of the palace. How long it was since he entered Sophienhof last! He glanced gloomily at the spot where he had stood on that unfortunate evening and suddenly discovered his father, when he had read in Rafaela's eyes that nothing had been able to kill her love. Then wild passion, hatred had come over him; he had rushed away through the dark night, and struck his clenched fists madly against his brow, while his heart cried out: "I will repay this!" Gradually his plan had matured. He shut himself up from the

world, and while faint echoes from Sophienhof instilled fresh drops of poison into his sick heart, he poured out his hatred and desire for vengeance in the pages which, under the title, "Madame Potiphar," fell like brimstone upon the wicked Sodom. Cyril's pale face, with the dark, flashing eyes, is defiant to-day, as he is about to set foot in Sophienhof once more.

Had he done wrong? Had "Madame Potiphar" been too harshly dealt with? No, he condemned a woman who openly displayed her love for another. He had not written a single untruth, nor had he judged her too severely. He could have forgiven her anything else, but this love, never. Many times his conscience and honor had reproached him for having pilloried a weak, defenseless woman, so he clung all the more to the proofs of her guilt, her unconcealed admiration of his father, which nothing could excuse. It was this love which irritated him to wild passion and the desire for vengeance. A strange calm had come over him since he had written this book ; the crisis was past.

Absorbed in thought, the young count entered the vestibule of Sophienhof. Faded flowers still stood in large vases, and in the large banquet hall at the left servants were busy putting things in order after last night's festivities. All faces wore a look of excitement, and the lackey who had admitted Cyril seemed anxious and ill at ease.

"I come to announce the visit of his highness the duke to his highness the prince," said the young count. "Will it be received?"

“Oh, Count Lankwitz. Matters are very, very bad with him—worse than ever,” sighed the faithful servant.

Cyril started slightly.

“How so? Has—has—his highness been excited in any way— Oh, that would be terrible !”

“Oh no, sir. The old trouble. His highness is always specially nervous when an entertainment is given here, and last night he had a worse attack. The valet says the physician thinks this is the beginning of the end, and that the brain is greatly affected.”

Count Lankwitz sank down in one of the chairs in the ante-room as though forgetting himself.

“That would be terrible !” he murmured, breathing heavily. “Does her highness know this?”

The lackey shrugged his shoulders.

“Her highness was still asleep, fifteen minutes ago.”

The door opened, and the prince’s adjutant, pale and disturbed, hastily crossed the threshold. He held out his hand absently to Cyril, and turned at once to the lackey.

“Görner, send the doctor’s carriage as quickly as possible to Professor Thielen. Tell him to come at once ; a fresh stroke has set in.”

The man rushed noiselessly out of the door, while the adjutant hastily summoned another attendant.

“Announce it to his highness, the duke, immediately. Run to the palace and give this bulletin into his highness’s own hands.”

Cyril hastily approached them.

“A moment, captain!” and he bent and whispered a few words to the adjutant.

“Oh, that is different,” said the latter in surprise. “So much the better. The princess then will learn it at once. Will you have the kindness, in this case, to notify his highness yourself, my dear count? Here is the note. I hope we can expect their highnesses in half an hour—no sooner, the physician requests. A thousand thanks in advance! *Au revoir!*” And the speaker hastily disappeared behind the *portières*.

With cold, trembling fingers, Cyril held the envelope, and turned like one in a dream to a lackey.

“How can I reach the princess’s reception room from here, and attract as little notice as possible?” he asked, dully.

“If the count will use the little bronze staircase which connects her highness’s drawing-rooms with the prince’s apartments.”

The man preceded Cyril through two side rooms, and drew back a *portière* which concealed a little winding staircase.

“This way, if you please, count.”

Slowly, breathing heavily, the young man mounted the staircase. Why did fate bring him here on this day of all others, and why was it so indescribably hard for him to go to her presence?



CHAPTER XII.

Even on the staircase, he could smell the delicate but intoxicating perfume which was inseparable from Rafaela. Cyril hesitated a moment, as he laid his hand upon the door-knob. Suppose the princess were to address him, and possibly inquire for the author of "Madam Potiphar."

He set his teeth defiantly. Should he tell her the truth, and thus play her the leading trump of his revenge? Yes, he will. What more has he to risk? He will lose his place, his position at court, but he was prepared for this when he wrote the book. He is free and independent. Castle Soltau is well adapted to solitude and banishment, and it will not be hard for him to leave the world; he has nothing more to lose. If she asks him he will tell her the truth; if she does not, he will see that she shall soon learn it. Unconsciously he sighs as he opens the door and noiselessly enters the room.

He stands in the princess's *boudoir*, just behind the white-silk *portières*, upon which his shadow had once fallen and startled the duke. Through the open doorway he sees Princess Rafaela reclining in an armchair, half turned from him.

She wears a filmy, trailing morning gown of white lace and ribbons. The flowing sleeves had fallen back from the raised white arms—for the young princess's face was buried in her hands, and she wept bitterly. The duke seems to have surprised her at her toilet: her long, curly hair fell in confusion from her lovely head. The little gold comb which had held it back had slipped out and caught in the loose locks.

His back to Cyril, his head supported by one hand, sat Duke Henry; on the floor, angrily tossed down, open, lay "Madame Potiphar."

She wept. Just at that moment she removed her hands from her face and looked at her brother. Tears trembled on her lashes, and bathed the pale, young face, which bore a look most foreign to it. Gone was the mockery and petulance; gone the bold, triumphant smile. The delicate lips quivered with deep and despairing pain, and her large tearful eyes expressed the same.

No, Cyril had not imagined Rafaela thus when weeping. He shivered, wished to advance, but his feet seemed weighed down with lead. He tried to speak but in vain did he open his lips.

"Truth? This book the truth, Henry?" came like a faint cry from Rafaela's lips. "And you say that to me, you who should know me better than this pitiless being, who judges and condemns without knowing whether he judges justly."

"Darling, he saw what, unfortunately, all could see."

She shook her hair back from her heated brow.

“What all could see ; that is just it. That man, who pretends to have such a knowledge of human nature, should have known that appearances are often deceitful.”

The duke leaned forward excitedly, and seized his sister's trembling little hand.

“Let us speak frankly to each other now, Rafaela,” said he, mildly, lovingly. “Let us discuss this unfortunate book point by point, and believe me, I will thank God on my knees if you can free me from a fancy which has held me, as well as the author of this book, captive during all the sad time of your marriage. Can you deny that you have treated Carl Gustav heartlessly and unlovingly?”

She drew herself up with flashing eyes.

“No,” said she firmly, “but I did him no wrong in doing so. Unlovingly ! Has the prince asked for my love ? What has he done to win my love, Henry ? Yes, I will be frank with you. I will confess to you that I tried, with all the hopelessness of a woman who feels herself alone and deserted as a wanderer in the desert, to win his. I had to marry a man whom I did not love, *had* to, Henry, and as that was the case, I wished to feel toward him as I should toward my husband.”

Rafaela set her teeth, and her cheeks flushed crimson.

“I made use of our wedding journey, when we were often alone, to draw nearer to him. I have kissed him, even called him tender names—oh, Henry, he might have won my love if he had chosen, for my heart was open to him with all the

frankness of a child. But he did not. He did not conceal from me that he was too old for petting and caressing, that he despised tenderness. He sat opposite me for hours with books and papers, vexed if I reminded him of my presence by a single question. That such coldness, such heartless, unloving coldness as I had never in my life met with before, embittered and wounded me, I need not assure you, especially as I soon discovered the reason of his roughness. Go in his room! Look in his writing desk. There lie the photographs of that woman whom he loved, whom he still loves, so that he is brutal to his unhappy wife, who was forced upon him for political reasons. She whom he loved he could not marry, and therefore he vented his hatred, his passionate bitterness upon me, the innocent girl who had been forced to sacrifice her love like him, who had not long been asked: 'Do you love him?' but who was forced to obey her prince and people, Henry. I am too proud to waste a kind or tender word upon a man who tramples me under foot as the curse of his life. He repulsed me, drove me from him; and as he clings with all the ties of memory to his lost youth and liberty, so do I. What obliges me to sacrifice my heart and entire young life with my bartered hand? I danced, amused myself, lived in my own apartments as I was unwelcome in his. And the world saw only what was plainly to be seen, and judged me. But God, who sees my poor tortured heart, will forgive me."

Duke Henry bent his face close to her convulsively clasped hands.

“Oh, Rafaela, forgive your prince and your people for imposing upon you too great a sacrifice,” he whispered in a choked voice. After a short pause, he continued softly: “But your child, your son, Rafaela! Could not his sweet, innocent love reconcile you to your fate?”

Rafaela sprang up in passionate excitement, and buried her face once more in her hands.

“The love of my child!” came like a cry of grief from her lips. “Ah, that, at least, you had not grudged me this love, this only happiness. ‘My youth, my delicate health,’ were the words which my tormentors chose. Why could I not care for my child myself? Then his heart would have belonged to me. But you took him from me, and laid him on the breast of a nurse, a strange woman, and when I, the mother, longing for a smile from her child, came, he turned his head away and screamed. If I took him in my arms and longed to love him, he struck out at me with his little hands. But he loved the stranger; cried for her, smiled at her, and hers not mine was the first name he lisped. Ah, Henry, my heart bled, and yet I was too proud to show unfeeling people how wretched, how poor is a woman condemned to a crown and purple. What was left me but this deceitful splendor, the golden cloak for a broken heart! Something like mad despair came over me, Henry. I sought distraction to deaden my pain, and the world saw and heard what was most plain—and it—judged me!”

The young princess sat down in her chair again with a cry of despair, but Cyril groped for the door

and leaned against it. He tried to speak, to cry out, but could not. He suffered torment and bowed his head to it. There was a rustle in the next room. The duke rose, went to the sobbing woman's side, took her face between his hands, and kissed it with deep emotion.

"The poor, poor princess!" sighed he. "If the world knew how heavy our crowns often are, it would judge more mildly—more mildly than the author of this book, which scourges an already breaking heart with thorns."

Again there was silence. Rafaela had thrown her arms around her brother's neck, and convulsive weeping shook her slender form.

"Do you really love Cyprian Lankwitz so deeply?" said the duke softly, after a moment.

Cyril started, and opening his eyes as one awaiting a sentence; he stared at the princess. She raised her head, gazed dreamily into space, and breathing deeply, slowly pushed back the hair from her forehead. Then her eyes met her brother's frankly. Involuntarily she clasped her little hands on her bosom.

"No, Henry, no, I do not love him," came coolly and calmly from her lips. "I do not love him."

"Child!" cried the duke, "why then do you act such a strange part, and compromise yourself thus in the eyes of the world?"

A flash of her old, mocking defiance lit up her tear-stained face.

"I was a fool, Henry. I was too proud to be true. I blindly wandered away. I was ashamed that I

had ever been loving and tender to the prince. It enraged me that he had sacrificed me to a former love. I wished to revenge myself, and repay like with like. Therefore I resorted to a childish adoration, which I can now no longer comprehend myself, and yet which was the only one in whose genuineness Carl Gustav would believe. I was wicked. I trifled with the most sacred feelings. I did it without remorse, for Cyprian Lankwitz is not the man who would ever die of a broken heart. Besides, he would assist me most easily in my plans, and the French idea that a wife may have her friends, favorites and admirers, without the slightest impropriety, had long been considered perfectly natural in our capital. My associates think no differently; no one blamed me but you and Renée, and I would not obey you. I hated you because you were indirectly the cause of all my misfortune. I acted like a foolish child; 'Madam Potiphar' has made this clear to me. I innocently compromised myself, for I did not love Cyprian. But the fault is not yours alone. He, too, he—"

She hesitated, while a crimson flush rose to her colorless cheeks.

"Of whom do you speak, darling?" asked the duke, lovingly.

She bit her lips, her fingers nervously twisted a lace handkerchief. With flashing eyes she raised her head:

"Of Cyril Lankwitz!" she ejaculated.

The involuntary listener in the next room pressed his hand to his heart, fairly gasping. Ah, that he

could flee to the end of the world ! How contemptible he seemed to himself to be standing here and listening to the deepest, most sacred confessions of a woman's heart ; but he could not go, he would rather die than leave now.

"Cyril Lankwitz !" repeated the duke in a tone of the utmost incredulity. "What has he, the hermit, the misanthrope, to do with you and your destiny?"

She breathed gaspingly—she could scarcely speak. Then she continued with sudden resolve :

"I have told you almost all. Henry, listen to the last. I hate Cyril Lankwitz ! He—he alone—drove me into this hated marriage."

"Child !"

"Listen, Hal !" Rafaela drew her brother down on a lounge and leaned her head against his shoulder, speaking very rapidly. "From the first I liked him, even very much. His gloomy, peculiar face fascinated me, his originality interested me. I sought a pretext to speak with him, and fancied that his father would be a pleasant, ever-new theme. Never, never did any one meet me in such a hostile, such an insulting manner. That angered me, and also excited me to opposition. I think that we might have been friends, good, faithful friends, had he behaved differently. He would certainly have pleased me much better than his father, had his grave manner, his way of converting people to his opinions, been less pedantic. I never injured him. Why did he offend me first, without cause ? All men rendered me homage. Why did he, alone, despise me in such a prudish, insulting manner ? Oh, Henry, he

gave me one of Cyprian's letters to read, with the malicious intention of humiliating me as deeply as possible. And I grudged him this triumph. I wished to show him that it had never been my intention to let myself be scorned by a Count Lankwitz, so with passionate defiance I closed my eyes and married Carl Gustav." The speaker paused, sighing deeply, then continued:

"That was the first link in a chain of foolish mistakes. That letter was like eating poison to my heart. I wished to prove to Count Cyril that I could see his father a slave at my feet at any moment, that not he but I was the scorner. You know the consequences. Cyprian was harder to manage than I thought. His cool opposition incited me to more and more senseless defiance, to carry my point in spite of everything. Cyril should not triumph, he should not; and so, in my madness, I took step after step, refusing all hands stretched out to restrain me on my slippery path. I risked the most dangerous coquetries to bring the captain to my feet. I did not heed mankind, or their stern morality; I only wished satisfaction. So I compromised myself for the sake of a man whom—whom I did not even love, and the world judged again from appearances only. There on the floor lies my sentence, 'Madam Potiphar;' that is my result, a new, disgraceful humiliation before Cyril. I accuse him. All that is in these pages, all that is meant to proclaim my guilt to the heavens, is his fault. He forced me into this labyrinth. He sowed the seed which is now reaped in this book. Oh, Henry, Henry, how

he can mock and deride his enemy now! How he will delight in this new insult!"

Loud, convulsive sobs once more shook her form, but the duke put his arm firmly and lovingly around her. Utmost surprise and emotion were depicted on his pale face, but he said gently and soothingly:

"You are mistaken, darling. Cyril is far too upright and brave to triumph in a public scandal, even though he might have many reasons for considering you his enemy. On the contrary, he has tried most faithfully to discover the author of 'Madam Potiphar.' He is far too faithful and devoted to tolerate any insult against a member of his sovereign's house. I have interrupted his investigations because I wished first to ask you, Rafaela, whether you care to learn the name of your slanderer."

Cyril's knees shook beneath him, and half fainting he had sunk down in an armchair and buried his face in his ice-cold hands. Now he let them sink down and looked up. His eyes rested passionately upon Rafaela's face.

The princess had risen, her hands were clasped convulsively before her. She breathed quickly, and a strange smile seemed to light up her tear-stained face.

"Henry, if he really has been so noble—if he really has done that for me! Oh, Henry, I do not deserve it of him. I would have much, much to ask his pardon for." Her voice was a mere breath.

"Yes, he did it, and he will do still more if you

will place sufficient confidence in him to let him act as your agent. Would you like to know the author?"

For a moment she stared absently before her, then turned violently to the duke. Her eyes flashed, and her face was crimson, down even to her white neck.

"Yes, Henry, I should. I should gladly know the author's name. Send Cyril Lankwitz to me if you think that he will enter Sophienhof voluntarily. Send him to me. Tell him I ask him to come—not the Princess Rafaela of former days, and not that Madam Potiphar who is being slandered so, but another, Carl Gustav's wife, the mother of the little crown-prince. If you tell him, Henry, he will probably come. I am not at home to Count Cyprian for the present, but my doors are open to his son. Tell him that, Henry. Then the world cannot throw another stone at me. A man like Hosanna, a gentleman of his reputation compromises no lady."

Cyril had risen unsteadily. He started back from his dark shadow which fell on the white *portières*. Softly he groped his way to the door, opened it noiselessly as he had come and staggered down the bronze staircase.

Cold drops of sweat stood on his brow. A groan like that of one mortally wounded escaped him. Then he rushed unsteadily down the last few steps.

In the vestibule stood two lackeys.

"His highness is probably dying, count," said one, with an anxious look. Cyril hastily handed him the envelope.

“His highness, the duke, is in the blue room with the princess. Deliver this note without delay.”

His voice was hoarse, half suffocated. The lackey rushed off, but Cyril looked neither to the right nor the left ; in feverish excitement he left Sophienhof, as though he were fleeing. He will not be missed in the sad confusion which the next hour brings, which plants the black flag of mourning over the gay palace of “Madam Potiphar.”





CHAPTER XIII.

The smiling April sky had clouded over, and a wind had arisen. It tossed the branches of the trees, shook the budding bushes, and fanned the bared head of the young man hurrying through the park, but Cyril did not notice it or the cold drops which struck him in the face; he did not heed the outer world, so absorbed in thought was he. Cyril, the cool, composed young man, whom nothing had ever before robbed of his self-possession, was now suddenly hurled down from his lofty pedestal. He had lost belief in himself; the stone which he had thrown with self-righteous zeal at another rolled back upon him and crushed him.

He threw himself down upon a bench, and buried his head in his hands. The tears which had shone on Rafaela's lashes became molten lead falling upon his heart. What had he done? He had tortured an already wretched fellow-creature. Her soft, pitiful voice still rings in his ears. He sees her sweet, tear-stained face, and feels his heart throb with grief. How can he expiate what he has done?

"Die—die!" howls the storm.

Yes, die, but would that help her who clings to

the false idea of his fidelity, and who begged in her sweet voice ; " Send him to me, Henry ! "

Shall he go, and throwing himself at her feet, cry : " It is I who persecuted you so unjustly ! " No, no, he cannot. Why does she not love his father ? That would make him strong in this hour of despair.

She does not love ; him, no, she does not love him. The first ray of sunlight breaks through the clouds, and irradiates the young man's face. She does not love him. He will not die. His despised, wretched life suddenly seems valuable. She does not love his father. She is alone, unloved and unhappy ; she shall be happy. She was unjustly attacked ; he will defend her, and will live for that.

He can never confess his guilt. Never ! It would separate him from her for all time ; and she has called for him. He has taken so much from her. Must he not first restore it to her ? Yes, he must ; it is his duty.

The storm has abated, and the sun breaks through the clouds, and peace gradually comes to the young man's troubled heart.

The book which he had written he now condemns with a passion which drives him from one extreme to another, and yet it was a mirror in which Rafaela, though innocent, would be benefited by looking, even although it placed a false mask before her face,—a bitter, but beneficial medicine.

The church bells of the city tolled, and the flags were at half-mast.

Prince Carl Gustav, whose end had been predicted for months, had yet died suddenly.

While faded flowers yet lingered in the dancing-hall, the prince lay on his death-bed.

This new sensational event crowded everything else into the background for the present. "Did we not say so?" the human ravens croaked. "Sophienhof is a widow's palace, and Princess Rafaela is a widow because she defied fate."

Many pitied the dead man, thus cut off so prematurely, others declared he was better off. As his marriage had not been a happy one, he and his wife were better separated. Now Princess Rafaela will probably hesitate to add the final chapter to "Madam Potiphar" by marrying Count Cyprian Lankwitz. She has given the country an heir, but still the succession depends upon but one life, and many citizens declare that, for the good of the country, the princess should, as soon as decency permits, marry another prince of royal blood.

These and similar views so absorbed all minds that surprise was general when it was announced that Princess Rafaela was ill with nervous fever, brought on by excitement and grief. In the last hours, at the death-bed of her husband, she had displayed a tenderness and depth of feeling of which no one had believed her capable. Perhaps the reading of "Madam Potiphar" had awakened her conscience; and realizing that it was too late to atone, she shrank with horror from the sight of death. But even this "sentimentality" the ladies and gentlemen of her gay court had not ascribed to her, and they were vexed because it so pleased the ducal party.

A reconciliation at the death-bed! Who would have thought that possible? Eye-witnesses declared that they had seldom been so affected as during that hour. The prince had not asked for his wife. He probably thought that after dancing all night she would be too weary to look into dying eyes; but Rafaela had fairly forced her way into his room, and her coming pleased the dying man. It seemed as though the light form brought with it a last ray of sunlight.

Kneeling at his bedside, she kissed his cold hands, and with touching words begged his forgiveness if her young flippant nature had too often grieved him, and in sweet, affecting words, promised that all should be different if he would only stay with her.

With a last effort, he laid his hands gently upon her head.

"Poor child," he murmured, "we have to forgive mutually. Neither understood how to bear with dignity the heavy burden which a princely crown imposes. Death is merciful, and will release us both." And after a short pause, he added: "Try to remember me kindly, Rafaela—and—and if you wish to make death easier for me, promise that you will love our son as a true, good mother!"

Sobbing loudly, she pressed her face against his hand.

"I do love him, Carl. I will do everything to make him love me in return."

Then she flitted noiselessly away, returning after a few minutes with the loudly screaming, strug-

gling little crown-prince in her arms. Her face was more ghastly than that of the dying man.

The darkened room, the grave strangers, frightened the child, and silenced it for the moment. It stared with great horrified eyes at its father whom helping arms supported on his pillows.

“My child, little Carl Henry!” smiled the prince, his eyes growing dim. “For the first time in his mother’s arms—God bless you both!”

That was his last conscious moment; delirium returned, then the lethargy from which he never rallied.

During the funeral ceremony, Rafaela was ill, and when the young princess drove out in the park for the first time, the frail-looking face surrounded by the long crape veil was so deadly pale and grave, that, at this unwonted sight, the citizens almost forgot to remove their hats in their amazement.

The princess had expressed the ardent wish that little Carl Henry should accompany her on her drive, but the attempt had been frustrated by the little prince’s uncontrollable screams.

The nurse declared in despair that it was only madam’s unusually gloomy attire that frightened the child, and as no coaxing or petting availed, Rafaela finally sighed resignedly :

“Torment him no longer, but come with him to my *boudoir* afterward; perhaps he will be better if I play with him.”

She gave the signal for departure, and the court lady noticed in alarm that great tears rolled over the pale cheeks, and this was also commented upon in the city, where every trifle was discussed.

So they also knew that the little prince had been as unruly and hostile toward his mother in her *boudoir* as previously in the carriage. All attempts to accustom him to her failed, and the mother evidently suffered from her child's outspoken dislike. The little prince clung all the more to the Duchess Renée, and although the two sisters-in-law had become fully reconciled since Carl Gustav's death, their friendly relations were doubly strengthened by the little prince's preference. The duchess consoled the poor, unhappy young mother with all the hopeful confidence peculiar to her nature.

"Let him grow older and become sensible," she laughed. "Children are unreliable. The more you trouble yourself about him now, the more obstinately he turns away. Wait awhile. Take the southern trip for the winter months which your physicians so earnestly advise. Baby will forget you meanwhile, and when he makes your acquaintance again, he will turn to you as quickly as to other ladies, who have the charm of novelty for him."

The duchess smiled confidently, and Rafaela threw herself into her arms, sobbing loudly. She did not hear what Renée said to the duke a few minutes later, sighing:

"Poor Rafaela! I tried to deceive her as to the truth, and hasten her departure. Carl will never accustom himself to her. Strangely enough, he seems to have inherited his father's cold, hostile feeling toward his mother."

Rafaela left the city, accompanied only by an old

court marshal and his widowed daughter. Nothing more was said of "Madam Potiphar," and the ducal couple anxiously avoided exciting the unhappy young mother by alluding to it. She had not asked for Cyril Lankwitz again, and consequently had not seen him, as she shrank timidly from all intercourse, even the most usual.

Since her departure, Sophienhof once more lay dark and deserted. At Duchess Renée's wish, the little crown-prince and his retinue had been transferred to the palace, where he might be under the duchess's loving care.

Regular and more and more encouraging news arrived from Rafaela. She lived very quietly in Nice, strictly preserving her *incognita*, and no one suspected that she was the original of "Madam Potiphar, which book was still much discussed, although it was no longer the leading topic of conversation. The health of the most charming of princesses improved. Rafaela once more took interest in the outer world, and in her last letter she mentioned "Madam Potiphar" herself, and asked if the author of the book had yet been discovered.

By the physicians' advice she would pass the summer at the seashore, and only at the expiration of her year of mourning return to her home and accustomed circumstances. The separation from the capital was no trial to her, but all the more that from her little son.

It seemed as though the princess wished now to make up for any former lack of love and care for her child. She wrote to the duke ;



DUKE HENRY HAD READ THIS LETTER.—See Page 153.

“The sad dividing wall which formerly stood between baby and me death has removed. Now, for the first time, I have the feeling that Carl Henry belongs wholly to me. I sincerely hope that the persons who tried to prevent my intercourse with the darling, and declared that ‘the nursery is no place for the princess’ will gradually yield me my rights. I suffer unspeakably under present conditions, and will only believe that God has forgiven me my faults, when He turns my child’s heart to me.”

Duke Henry had read this letter in loud, excited tones in Renée’s *boudoir*, unsuspecting that Count Cyril Lankwitz was waiting in the next room to hand the duchess several private telegrams and petitions, he having been made, on the duchess’s birthday, her chamberlain, a distinction which seemed to have had a strange effect upon the young man. His former mood and misanthropy had changed to a most remarkable graciousness and consideration toward every one. Though still grave and gloomy, he was no longer bitter and morose, but rather behaved like one who is trying to fight his own prejudices and to atone.

Society could not understand this miracle, but now welcomed the former misanthrope with open arms; and Count Cyprian was the most delighted of all, declaring that now, for the first time, did he really understand that his son was, indeed, his own flesh and blood.

Different as the two were, they might often now be seen in the same drawing-room, where strangers still always took them for brothers. Cyril had a most excellent influence upon his father, and although Cyprian would not give up extravagant habits in a night, it became painful for him to allow this son,

whose gifts he admired and recognized more and more, to pay his debts again and again.

Count Cyprian did not grow old. The silver threads in his hair did not detract from his good looks, but father and son were not in the least jealous of each other, and their relations pleasanter than ever.

It excited great amusement among the ladies that in time a most tender friendship had been formed between the young chamberlain, Lankwitz, and the now three-year-old crown-prince. How this had come about no one knew, but whoever had seen the world of love and tenderness in the dark eyes, or heard the loving tone in the deep voice when the count held the little golden-haired prince on his knees and told him such delightful fairy tales, could have understood why Carl Henry threw his arms around Cyril's neck and declared :

“I love you. You must stay with me always !”

No one had such an influence over the spoiled child as the chamberlain, and it had become a matter of course that Count Cyril was to be sent for to bring the obstinate child to reason when any conflict arose.

Duchess Renée had told the princess of this amusing fact, but had received no answer from Ra-faela. Her letters grew daily more impatient and longing, and finally a brief, decided telegram announced her return to Sophienhof, the widow's palace.



CHAPTER XIV.

Castle Bahrenberg had lain for years as though in a sleep. Since the two sisters, Claudine and Florence, had moved into their magnificent double palace, many autumn storms had swept over it. Life passed monotonously, one day just like the next, with no refreshing breath of novelty, no intercourse with the outer world.

Had it been monotonous there before Florence's flight and marriage it was now fairly death-like. No new servants were engaged, all was old, frail and moldy, and those who daily saw the tall woman in her deep mourning forgot that there was laughing, young life in other castles. Here no one laughed or danced; here lived only a solitary, unhappy woman, for Claudine was unhappy, embittered; all her life she had been deceived, lonely and misunderstood.

The very wealthy Baroness Claudine! Often she sat in the tower-room, and the moonlight fell on her pale, sad face, as her thoughts flew far back to the past. Mother-love! An unknown word to her. The days of her childhood were dark and empty,

broken only by her father's passionate bursts of rage. But once had there come a ray of sunlight, when she was allowed to accept her aunt's invitation. What a memorably, happy moment that had been when she first entered the brightly lighted dancing-school. Shy, scarce daring to breathe, she stood in a corner, her little heart quivering with delight, for now the dreams of her fairy-tales were to come true. She gazed about the dancing-hall, and waited for the curly-haired prince, who would surely come and take pity on Cinderella.

And he came! How handsome he was! They called him Valleral. The boys admired him and the girls trembled with delight, and blushed like a rose when he honored them with a glance.

Poor, ugly weed, what does the sun care that your whole heart belongs to him. He seeks only the queen-flower, the rose.

Claudine loved with all the passion of her young heart, with all the fidelity of a lonely nature, but he never noticed the quiet country girl, nor saw how pale she grew as he passed her again and again, choosing some fairer one from her side.

These were torments for her young heart. She looked forward to nothing but the dancing-lessons, and when they came they brought nothing but humiliation. One day she danced opposite him in a quadrille. Her face flushed. The consciousness of being seen by him made her more awkward than ever. Valleral did not suspect what sharp ears she had, nor that they were strained to hear his voice above the music.

“Good gracious, the poor little country girl is homely. Some homeliness is allowed, but Claudine abuses this leave,” he said to his partner, and then laughed merrily as ever.

But a frost had fallen on the poor weed, and killed its only young blossom of love. Claudine suffered indescribably, fled back to solitude, and sought consolation in her father’s misanthropical teachings. She had inherited a tendency in this direction. Now it became deep-rooted.

All that was left her was her sister. She concentrated all her tenderness on Florence, and when she deceived her and secretly fled, nothing remained but despair. She could not pardon Florence; the latter had not deserved it. All her efforts at reconciliation were prompted, not by love—if she had loved her, could she have thus wounded her?—but by avarice.

This was the last bitter drop in her cup. Claudine von Bahrenberg had done with her sister. She had no other relatives, nor was she sufficiently interested in charitable institutions which she had never seen, to leave them her enormous fortune.

The old lady stares thoughtfully into space. She sits in her favorite place at the tower window. A racking cough shakes her thin form ever and anon. She feels that before the first snow covers the churchyard her end will have come. And this thought fills her heart with peace. But to whom shall she leave all her wealth?

Mechanically her eyes glance around the room; suddenly they rest upon a book lying on her writ-

ing-desk, and a flush rises to the sunken cheeks, and her eyes brighten as though she had seen the face of one long sought.

Yes, a friend. Why did her thoughts wander so far into the past, while here, close beside her, lies the best, most faithful friend she has met in years—"Madam Potiphar!"

How much diversion, how many pleasant hours this book has given her! It was indeed the only friend who had sought her out in her loneliness, and who had given her news once more of him whom she had never forgotten, but about whom she had questioned no one—Cyprian Lankwitz. Reviews of this book, which had created such scandal by its comments upon society in the capital, had first called her attention to it. She had ordered it, and read it with ever-increasing enthusiasm. All these opinions were hers; the author of the book felt as she did, and that brought him nearer the hermit of Bahrenberg than any one before. She had sent her agent to the capital to learn the author, with what result can be imagined.

She grew more and more fond of the book. Its delightful, if sharp, humor made her smile, although she fancied she had forgotten how. The unknown author, "Severin," amused her, made her laugh and cry, and shortened her lonely hours. Truly, this anonymous "Severin" deserved to be rewarded.

A smile lit up the sick woman's features, and hastily, in nervous dread, lest death might frustrate her plans, she commanded a messenger to ride to

the nearest town, and fetch lawyers, that she might make her will.

The lawyers came just in time. The invalid's condition had been aggravated by her feverish excitement.

The will was drawn up, and to the amazement of the lawyer, Claudine, Baroness von Bahrenberg, made the author of the book, "Madam Potiphar," A. Severin, the universal heir of her large fortune. Baroness Florence Ohly's name was not mentioned, and her daughter, Mignon, inherited only the old family diamonds, which must remain in the family.

Half the castle and fine estate, as well as Claudine's actual cash, were to fall to an unknown man who had alarmed the fashionable world by a book whose contents were so scandalous that he was forced to conceal his identity behind a pseudonym.

A notary called the baroness's attention to the fact that "A. Severin" was a mask which, in spite of all conceivable efforts, had as yet remained unpierced, but one of the other men interrupted him with a significant wink.

"Pray, my good friend, do not grudge the world this fine joke. Think of the sensation. The author of 'Madam Potiphar' is offered a princely fortune if he will lift his visor. Something so interesting has not occurred before in the nineteenth century. Do you think a mortal can resist this tempting will? Never! My fingers burn to publish the announcement in the newspapers. So keep still. Whether it is a pseudonym or not, now we will discover the author of 'Madam Potiphar.'"

So the testament was signed and sealed, and such peaceful calm came over Baroness Claudine that her physician almost began to hope for an improvement in her condition.

But when the first snow-flakes whirled in the air, the martyr of Bahrenberg lay pale and cold upon her pillow, and it seemed to those who saw her that the homely old face had never looked so beautiful as since the kiss of the silent angel who ends all earthly misery.

The lawyers could scarcely await the time for opening the will. With one stroke, the already half-forgotten "Madam Potiphar" would be the center of interest, and solution of the anonymous riddle would surely create more sensation than in the first place the book had created.

And it was so.

Probably printers' ink never created more sensation than the legal announcement that Baroness Claudine von Bahrenberg had left her large fortune to the author of the book, "Madam Potiphar," and that the author, "A. Severin," or the person identical with this pseudonym, had only to present himself to the undersigned lawyer, and prove his identity, to enter upon his inheritance.

This was an event which would electrify the coldest being.

Public interest grew from day to day.

"Has he announced himself?" was the burning question.

There was no other topic of conversation, and where "Madam Potiphar" had long lain in a corner,

it was quickly brought out again and dusted. It had never been imagined that Claudine von Bahrenberg would thus excite their curiosity and impatience once more.

But "A. Severin" was a pseudonym and—remained one.





CHAPTER XV.

Count Cyril Lankwitz's rooms were noticeable for their extreme simplicity. Heavy old furniture, costly only because of its age, had been brought from his mother's old castle. Ornaments, arms and costly knick-nacks would only have been in his way, in which respect he was a striking contrast to his father, whose refined, artistic taste never wearied of accomplishing new marvels of decoration and comfort, which trifles consumed a small fortune.

Cyril sat in his large leather-covered armchair, a thick wolfskin beneath his feet, an extinguished cigar between his teeth. He was absorbed in his work, and forgetful of all else. An open letter from Princess Hermine lay before him; and the young count was poring over the damaged chronicles which he had saved from Neudeck.

There was a furious ring at the door-bell.

Only Count Cyprian rang thus. His hasty, elastic step was heard almost immediately in the hall.

"Good evening, my boy," he cried, entering the room. "The devil! Busy again?" Valleral slapped his son affectionately on the back, then threw his

coat to the old servant who had limped after him, and rubbed his hands. "Something warm, old man. A little cognac—but quick!"

The servant gave his young master a helpless, imploring glance, and Cyril quickly pushed back his chair and laid down his pen.

"This is delightful, papa. I have just this moment finished. Some cognac, then, at once!" And he drew out his keys and went up to an old carved sideboard. "You may go, Braun. I have everything here."

The captain followed his son, both hands in his pockets, and stared curiously over his shoulder into the open cupboard. He laughed softly to himself.

"Just like an old maid! Everything neat and orderly. Glasses, bottles and plates—canned goods—dear me, you can serve a breakfast at any moment," and he threw himself down upon the comfortable old sofa. "You are a queer fellow, Hosanna! To be sure, you live as uncomfortably as a backwoodsman, without any service; but even that has its advantages; you are spared much vexation. I am not distrustful, but now I believe that you are right, and that that wretched Parisian, my valet, robs me unmercifully."

"Have you discharged him?"

Valleral sighed and took the offered glass of cognac.

"To be frank, I have not the courage, I am so used to the fellow. He is so attentive, knows all my habits and likings; and, do you know, my boy, at my age, one becomes a trifle lazy and helpless,

and the perpetual training of servants is terrible."

"Still I should think it more agreeable than such a reversed order of things. You are not Moulin's master ; he is yours."

Cyprian laughed.

"I have often thought recently what a wretched existence an old bachelor leads."

Cyril raised his head abruptly.

"And you say that?"

"I say it. Even liberty may become burdensome, because one who possesses it usually abuses it. It has lost the charm of novelty for me, and in spite of my gay life, I am unspeakably bored. How valuable a true woman's love is ! I long for all the tender interest your mother used to take in everything that concerned me. Who really sympathizes now with me?"

"I, father."

"My good boy ! Yes, you are a comfort when I can come and unburden my heart to you, but you live here and I live there ; and however attached a father and son may be, it is quite different from the love of a wife, who is one heart and soul with you !"

Cyril laughed nervously.

"You are in a strange mood to-day, papa, a mood which I have never seen you in before." He laid his arm on the captain's shoulders. "What makes you so gloomy ? Moulin alone, or a mournful, serious ebb in the cash-box, which all your joy and love of life have drained ?"

Valleral smoothed his handsome mustache

thoughtfully. He smiled, but even his smile was somewhat sad.

"Ebb—a serious ebb!" he sighed, deeply. "Ah, dear, innocent, saintly Hosanna, what does a model man like you know of the terrible meaning of this word?" He rose and paced the room excitedly. Suddenly he paused before his son and rested both hands heavily on his shoulders. "Cyril," he murmured, "I foolishly gambled for a few evenings, had no luck, and am on the verge of ruin."

The young count started up in horror.

"Good heavens!" he groaned.

But Valleral continued, with flushed face:

"As I know that at present you need every penny yourself to tide over the strike of your miners without impairing your estates, I look upon it as absolutely out of the question, my boy, that you should hold your hopeless old father above water this time. What I need is too much—and so—so—" The speaker paused, drew out his perfumed handkerchief, and mopped his brow. Cyril sat as though paralyzed, and stared straight before him. "And so?" he repeated, faintly, mechanically. "So I must marry?"

"Marry!"

"And some wealthy, very wealthy woman," said Valleral, seating himself comfortably on the sofa again. Now that he had once mentioned the specter, it had lost its terror for him. Uncomfortable moods were always of short duration with him, and now his gay temper had the upper hand again. "You see, my boy, you have no concern in the mat-

ter; you are independent, of age, and—the devil!—I have no more money to leave you, so it really is quite indifferent to you how many brothers and sisters might share in the inheritance of this nothing.”

Cyril seemed scarcely to hear him.

“And upon which of our wealthy heiresses has your choice fallen?” he asked

Cyprian had completely shaken off his pessimistic mood. He rolled a cigarette most cheerfully, and crossed his legs, displaying his handsome silk hose above his patent-leather shoes.

“Well, my boy, it is probably best that I should be quite frank with you, so that we may both know what we wish, and what, if I succeed, is to keep my head above water. Therefore—in short—I think of courting the princess.”

“Rafaela?” came like a trembling cry from Cyril’s lips.

The captain laughed.

“Does it astonish you? I thought the prophecy of it was already in every one’s mouth. Have you forgotten ‘Madam Potiphar?’ And especially now, when it has been recalled to every one’s memory. But of that later. First, let us come to the root of the matter. Rafaela, then. Do you not find this match quite a suitable one?”

Cyril did not answer; his deathly pale face was averted, so his father continued gayly:

“She is a widow and independent; she has done her duty and given the country an heir to the throne. Now it is time for her to think of her heart, and not merely her country.”

“Of her heart!”

“And that this heart, with all its passionate love, belongs to me, she has proved plainly enough.”

“Indeed! Are you so perfectly sure?”

“Perfectly. Her manner could never leave me in doubt.”

“Even during her widowhood? Have you spoken alone with her since Carl Gustav’s death?” The speaker’s voice sounded hollow and muffled.

“No, not that. The poor little woman has behaved in a most exemplary manner, and that attracts me—yes, in fact, it was that that first turned my heart to her.”

Cyril’s eyes flashed strangely.

“And if the princess only coquetted with you; if she never seriously thought of marrying you?”

The captain shrugged his shoulders with a light laugh.

“Old love does not die. I believe that I am still irresistible enough to win any woman whom I actually desire to win. Let me merely go to work as a lover. You will marvel.”

Cyril frowned. “Has your heart really chosen her, father, or do you merely wish to marry her to avert ruin?”

Valleral leaned his handsome head thoughtfully back upon the cushion.

“This question is easier asked than answered. Let us see. In love up to my ears, as the saying goes; in love with all the youthful, passionate fire of a first love—no, Cyril, probably my heart is no longer capable of that, although really it is remark-

able when one considers Rafaela's charms and great beauty. But love is acknowledged to be blind, and belongs in the category of absurdities to which no logic can be applied. What was formerly so distasteful to me in Rafaela's manner that it prevented me from falling passionately in love with her, was possibly the fact that she offered me her love unasked. Since her widowhood, since the unfortunate 'Madam Potiphar' appeared, she has treated me coldly, distantly, even indifferently. That pleased me. She has become more and more to my taste, and if the witch continues to treat me so badly, perhaps, despite my gray hairs, I may fall passionately in love with her. At present—you see how alarmingly frank I am—I feel no warmer emotions toward her than toward any other lady. They all pay too much court to me, so they all bore me. My mind can, therefore, form my plans all the more clearly. Rafaela would be the most brilliant match for me, even if she did not wear a coronet. 'Madam Potiphar' has, to a certain extent, compromised the princess with me. I will show her that in the proper light and make it seem plausible. She will see that our marriage has become a moral necessity. Her love will become more ardent, and Hymen will give us his blessing. Now, you must admit that I am right, my boy."

Cyril was deathly pale. He pressed both hands to his head, as though forcing himself to be calm.

"The world has forgotten 'Madam Potiphar,' the book has lost its effect," he murmured hoarsely.

The captain sat up eagerly.

“Forgotten? Now, after Claudine Bahrenberg’s will, forgotten?” he cried, looking as though he did not understand.

The young chamberlain stared at him blankly.

“What has Baroness von Bahrenberg to do with ‘Madam Potiphar?’”

“Boy!—Man alive, have you not yet heard the latest? I really believe, Hosanna, you think the newspapers too godless to read!”

“I do not understand you!” gasped the tortured Cyril.

Cyprian hastily drew a paper from his pocket.

“You have not read this yet?”

“No, why should I have read it?”

“Oh, *sancta simplicitas*! The bookworm pores over leather folios, and refreshes himself with the news of past centuries, while the present hurls its bombs into the world. Here, read, and remain in possession of your senses.” Laughingly the captain opened the newspaper and placed it in his son’s hands.

Cyril glanced at it indifferently. Suddenly he started slightly and stared at a column in breathless horror. Claudine von Bahrenberg had made the author of “Madam Potiphar” her sole heir! That was again an inexhaustible supply of water for the mill of scandal. That was an event of inestimable consequence. As though crushed by the weight of this second, unexpected blow, Cyril’s head fell forward on his trembling hands.

“Oh, God, this is terrible!” he groaned.

The captain burst into loud laughter.

"Boy, are you crazy? You are as sentimental to-day as a consumptive maiden. Why does the Bahrenberg will irritate you? I would at most think it unfortunate that I am not the author of the little book. *Parbleu!* In that case I would not hesitate for a moment to give up my *incognito*. The inheritance mounts into the millions, and for such a prize I would gladly let myself be wondered at as an intellectual man."

Cyril raised his head suddenly, his face distorted with emotion.

"Indeed? And Princess Rafaela? Would you so easily give up her love and hand for this miserable mammon?" cried Cyril, bitterly.

"Why give it up? At first she would, of course, hurl all her thunder-bolts of disfavor upon me," said Valleral, shrugging his shoulders carelessly. "But that would make our little war of love interesting. I imagine the angry goddess would be charming, and I am vain enough to flatter myself that in time I could reconcile her. Pah! Why do we discuss soap-bubbles! Unfortunately, poor devil that I am, I am not the author of 'Madam Potiphar,' and my only consolation in the matter is that perhaps I will now learn who the droll fellow is who described me—ha, ha, ha!—as a prudish Joseph."

Cyril sat erect, and a look of unnatural repose made his colorless face appear rigid.

"Do you think, then, that he will announce himself? Possibly there are men to whom such wealth would be a recompense for anything." He inter-

rupted himself hastily. "Well, let us return to our first and more important theme. So you have debts? Pray tell me the amount, papa."

"Nonsense! I will not consent that you pay them."

"This one—last time it will probably be possible for me to do so!" the young count hastily assured him, and for the first time the color returned to his cheeks. "Do you think I would allow you to be your wife's slave merely because she had saved you, with a few banknotes, from poverty? You are not suited to married life; it would be your misery."

"Oh, no, indeed! I assure you, on my word, that I will feel quite comfortable in my old days, as a domestic man."

Valleral calmly lighted a cigarette, after offering one to his son, who declined with a gesture.

"You see, I am still a handsome fellow, am wonderfully successful with the ladies, but—who knows how long this will last!"

Cyril made an impatient movement.

"Do not deceive yourself with such illusions which will never be realized. A man like you would not submit to feminine caprice. Your domestic happiness would not last long, and instead of a comfortable, untroubled old age, you would have a hell upon earth. I beg you, let me arrange your affairs this one time. It will be the last time possible, but if God wills, also the last that you need my help, eh, father?"

"You may fully rely upon that, Hosanna!" said the captain, firmly. "Had I not drunk so much

champagne, it would not have happened—on my word!”

“And you will give up your absurd matrimonial plans?”

Valleral sighed.

“Heaven knows why you get along so badly with the princess. She would surely have listened to me—but—oh, well, I will not be unthankful to you, my good boy.”

“Promise me—I beg you.”

“A vow? Good gracious, then, night and day, I should be tempted to break it. Who can seriously answer for his heart? If the princess continues to treat me badly, my obstinacy will demand that her heart be captivated once more. Good heavens, boy, do not look so wild! The knife is not actually at my throat yet, if you really will be so generous as to buy off your old father once more—”

“Yes, I will. Have you time to discuss the details of the matter with me at once?”

“Impossible, my dear, nor is there such urgency. My creditor is a gentleman. I should like to pay a call, and find out when and where Rafaela will make her entrance to-morrow. I should like to send her some flowers as greeting.”

“The hour of her arrival is to remain an absolute secret, as her highness travels *incognita*, and has forbidden all official welcome.”

“Nonsense! That is merely some bit of importance on the court marshal’s part. Why this absolute secrecy? That the city should be decorated and illuminated, and a delegation sent to the railway

station is superfluous, and can easily be omitted. But why we, members of society, should be treated like children before Christmas, I do not understand."

"The princess probably intends to live as quietly now as before."

"Heaven forbid such a notion. All extremes are absurd, and she was no such Mary, heaven knows, that she need suddenly become a Mary Magdalen. It is all the influence of that infamous book, 'Madam Potiphar!' It would be an eternal shame if our gay, harmless princess should mourn in sackcloth and ashes for the rest of her life."

"That is not necessary if she really tries to avoid everything that may occasion talk. God grant that the poor young thing may be better understood and more justly judged than formerly."

"I wish her that with all my heart." The captain rose and rang for his overcoat. "But one thing I know, I will write the next 'Madam Potiphar,' and then, perhaps, my friend, Baroness Ohly, will give me the other half of Bahrenberg."

"Ohly! You remind me most opportunely of an involuntary sin. Here is an invitation which is doubtless addressed to you: 'Count C. von Lankwitz.' As that name belongs to us both, and the baroness saved her ink and did not add 'Captain,' I opened the letter, thinking it was addressed to me."

"C. von Lankwitz. I find it quite serious to have a son with the same initial," laughed Cyprian, opening the note hastily.

"And besides that, our strangely similar hand-

writing," said Cyril. "Pray, sign all your love-letters with your name in full."

"Of course. Ah, friend Ohly has at length returned from her wanderings. 'Mignon's education by sea and land is completed.' Heaven help us! Surely a highly modern young lady, with a classical education, and a volume of her own writings upon the emancipation of woman in her pocket. Well, then: 'Mignon's education is completed. We think of making our quarters here for the winter, and will be very pleased if you, my dear count, will, as an old friend, be our first dinner guest. To-morrow evening, at six o'clock, we expect Countess S.'—Oh, heavens, S.!—'to be with us on her way north. In case you are free and willing'—that, of course, Annie Florence, I will come! Thanks, Cyril, this note really pleases me. You were foolish not to accept it for yourself. Had I been in your place I would have played the devil of a joke. Well, so much the better. Hosanna permits himself no such jokes as gray-haired Valleral. Good-by, then, you dear old chap. To-morrow afternoon I will come and discuss the fatal story of the missing gold-pieces with you. Ha, ha! Good night, my dear sober-sides. I suppose you will not come with me to the club?"

"Not for the world!"

"Well, there have to be such odd fellows in a world! Good-by, then, my boy. May all the muses be gracious to you." And Valleral, after a hearty shake of his son's hand, hurried away. His moodiness was gone like snow in April, and his face was once more all sunshine.



CHAPTER XVI.

The morning sun shone in Cyril's rooms. Outside was all the splendor of a winter landscape. The ground was white with snow. At the duke's wish, Cyril now occupied rooms in the palace, and this morning the young chamberlain stood at one of the windows, his head resting against the cold pane. He sighed deeply.

A few more hours, and fast horses would bring the most charming of princesses back to her native city, and with her all the pitiless spirits of remorse and grief, who would whirl her in their wild dance around the author of "Madam Potiphar," and a new opponent of his happiness, his own father, will appear.

The young count stares out at the winter morning, and does not hear the hasty knock on the door. Only the turning of the knob makes him turn his head.

A lackey bows deeply and respectfully.

"What is it, Folkstone?"

"I beg the count's pardon if I disturbed him.

Miss Breddon and Madame de Jory are in despair over his highness, the little prince. His highness will not let himself be dressed, and is screaming himself into such a state of excitement that the ladies fear he will be very cross when her highness arrives, which may be at any moment."

"And I am to come?"

"The ladies earnestly begged the chamberlain."

"I will follow you immediately, Folkstone."

Another bow and the lackey disappeared behind the *portières*. Cyril went to his writing-desk and hastily slipped a small object in his breast-pocket. Then he turned at once to the door.

A simple carriage with the ducal arms, but without footman or lackeys, rolled through the palace gateway.

Duke Henry had been awaiting it, standing at a window; and now ringing a bell violently, he gave orders that the duchess should be notified, and hurried to the hall.

The doors had been hastily thrown open, and lackeys rushed from all sides, but they came too late. Princess Rafaela, followed by her lady-in-waiting, hurried up the steps, and excitedly threw herself into her brother's arms.

"How is he, Henry? Is he well?"

The duke smiled, and offered her his arm.

"Perfectly so, darling. The little fellow is blooming. Welcome home! Where will you go first? Renée awaits you in the gallery."

"Let us go to her at once. She will accompany me to Baby?"

“Of course.” And the duke can scarcely keep pace with the hurried steps of the mother.

The court lady had expected some orders, but as none came, she withdrew discreetly, to give directions concerning the luggage. Such an informal arrival of a princess had never before occurred in the palace. Meanwhile, Duchess Renée clasped her sister-in-law in her arms with tender joy.

“How fresh and blooming you look, Rafaela!” she cried delightedly. “Thank Heaven the sacrifice of your journey was not in vain.”

Rafaela smiled absently, and pushed the heavy crape veil still further back from the lovely face.

“Which room does Baby occupy?” said she, impatiently. “Quick, quick! Let us go to the little one, Renée. You do not know how I long for him.”

“Will you not first change your dress?” pleads the duchess, glancing anxiously at the princess’s deep mourning garb.

“No, no! There will be time enough for that.”

“Remove your hat and veil at least. Perhaps Baby will be frightened at the gloomy look.”

With trembling hands Rafaela laid both aside before any one could come to her assistance.

“Ah, not that, not that I frighten him!” said she, softly. “I have looked forward to seeing my child so much, Renée. I could not bear it if he were afraid of me.”

The ducal pair exchanged a hasty glance.

“Nonsense, Rafaela. You must be prepared for that. I wrote you that Carl Henry is remarkably shy, and greets every strange face with a scream.

Think that you have been separated from him for a year."

The princess's rosy cheeks have paled. She clasps her hands.

"Ah, Renée, if only this pain might be spared me! I would give half my life for a welcoming smile from my child!"

"Be sensible, little sister, and do not require anything unnatural of a three-year-old child. Come! We will first secretly rejoice in the sight of him. Watched from a distance, when he plays by himself, and talks to his accustomed circle, he is prettiest."

"Let us go through Madame de Jory's room."

Softly the three royal personages hurry to the little prince's suite. Noiselessly Rafaela draws back the *portières*, advances a few steps over the thick carpet, into the room, and gazes through the open door of the next one into her child's play-room. She pauses and, with a happy smile on her lips, listens once more to the beloved little voice.

"Mamma is coming! And mamma is the dear, good Christmas angel! What will she bring Carl Henry?" it says, somewhat impatiently.

"What will mamma bring her little prince?" replies a man's deep, rich voice. "A great heart full of love. And, if Carl Henry is very, very good to mamma, then she will fasten on her large, golden wings, like the beautiful angel here, and fly up to the dear Christ-child, and ask him to bring all the fine playthings that the little prince wishes."

"Why does not mamma always have golden wings on her shoulders?"

"Because then she would have to fly up to heaven, and stay there always, instead of with us, and that would be very, very sad, for without dear mamma we could never be happy."

"Would you cry if she flew like an angel?"

"Yes, I would cry bitter tears."

"Do you love mamma, too?"

"Very dearly!"

"Shall she bring you some pretty things from the Christ-child, too?"

"She will only do that if my little prince gives her a sweet kiss and loves her. Look at this picture well, for then you will know mamma at once."

"She will not look so black."

"Yes, mamma has put on a black dress."

"Will she bring Carl Henry a great big sugar-house?"

"Certainly, if Carl Henry gives her a sweet kiss."

"Henry will give her a kiss. Mamma must come very soon, or else Carl Henry will scream."

Rafaela had long since taken a step forward. Her eyes rested in unbounded amazement upon the strange scene before them. Her little son sat on Count Cyril Lankwitz's knee, his blond head resting tenderly upon the count's breast, and chatted with him in his lisping childish way. And what pains the count took to win the willful little heart for the mother! The princess trembled, and with outstretched arms ran and sank down beside her child.

"Carl Henry! Darling! Here comes mamma to her treasure!"

Cyril had started abruptly, and the little prince

threw his arms anxiously around his neck, and stared with great, frightened eyes at this unexpected apparition.

"Mamma, Carl Henry; this is mamma!" cried Cyril, joyously, quickly recovering himself. "Now, give her a kiss quickly and say, How do you do."

The child still drew back, shyly.

"You give her a kiss, first," said he suspiciously.

Cyril flushed crimson. He stooped and hurriedly whispered a few words in the child's ear, and with a joyful cry, Carl Henry held out his arms to his mother and let her take him in her arms.

"Dear, dear mamma. Bring a great big tree, with candles, from the Christ-child."

Tears rushed to Rafaela's eyes. She embraced the child with passionate tenderness, and her eyes were radiant as the little face was pressed affectionately against hers, and the child kissed her.

"Dear, dear little Henry!" she sobbed.

"A sugar-house and a big tree with candles. Where are your golden wings, mamma?" cried the prince, joyfully, and discovered at the princess's throat his own miniature, surrounded with diamonds.

"That is Carl Henry. Cyril says Carl Henry lives in mamma's heart, and mamma lives in Cyril's heart—in here!" and he tapped the count's breast-pocket, to which the latter had returned the princess's picture.

The duke and the duchess had joined the group, while the ladies-in-waiting, breathless with surprise, hurried, courtesying, from the adjoining room.

Rafaela had risen, still with the child in her arms, clasping him as though in a dream, until he struggled and desired to be set down that he might "show mamma his great, big horse."

The duke had laid his hand on Cyril's shoulder.

"That was a master-stroke, my faithful Ekkehard," he whispered, beaming with pleasure.

The count bowed and wished to withdraw modestly ; but Rafaela hastily turned to him. She tried to speak, but could not. In overwhelming gratitude, she silently held out both hands, but in her eyes was a whole world of happiness.

Lankwitz bowed quite as stiffly as formerly. He drew her hand to his lips and murmured unintelligible words. His face was deeply flushed, but his eyes looked quite, quite different from formerly. Rafaela gazed up at him in wonder. Then he hastily withdrew.

Carl Henry eagerly produced all his playthings that his little hands could carry. Mamma must see them all, and put on her golden wings and fly up to the Christ-child and get a great many more. Rafaela's face was radiant.

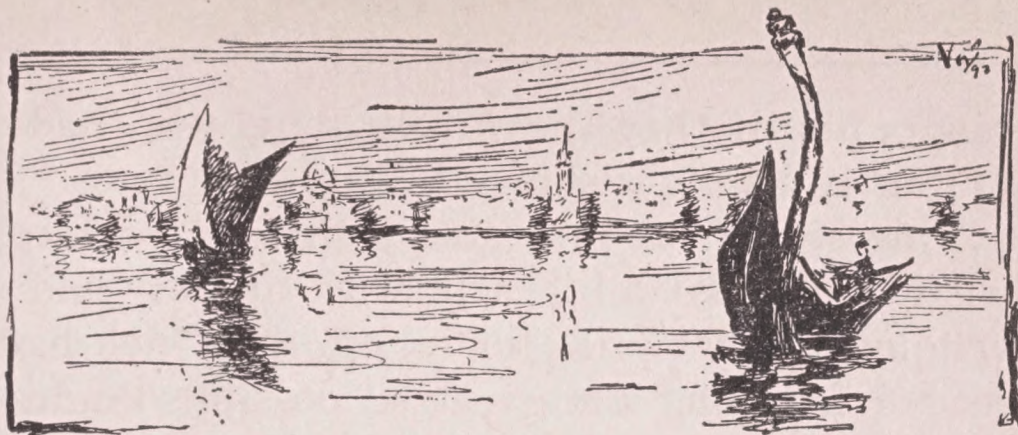
Fatigue, hunger and thirst were forgotten. She sat beside her child, and played with him as excitedly as though she feared this were a dream, from which she might waken all too soon. Cyril's long, secret efforts had borne golden fruit. The nimbus with which he had surrounded the mother's name and picture in the little prince's eyes now glorified the reality, and the child, usually so shy and disagreeable, intolerant of any stranger near him, now

saw in his mother the lovely angel who had come to gratify all his wishes.

This wove the first strong threads of love, and what had filled all hearts with anxiety had been vanquished by Cyril's tender efforts, which had succeeded in doing the greatest possible kindness to the mother-heart.

Now he stood in his room at the window and gazed out at the world which had never before seemed so golden and sunny, and, folding his hands, he thought: "I have sinned greatly against her, but in this hour I have graciously been permitted to atone for some of my former deeds."





CHAPTER XVII.

Baron von Ohly's house was brilliantly lighted.

Cyprian sprang from his carriage, and hurried up the steps. He seemed to be the first guest.

Baroness Florence looked as fresh and gay as ever. She wore a white toilet, with black velvet trimmings, as sole sign that she really was in mourning. To take further notice of her sister's death seemed to be foolishness to her. Claudine had died without being reconciled to her sister. Her will had been an open disgrace and slight to the Ohly family. It would be absurd to shed crocodile tears for such a sister.

"The baron is suffering from gout, my dear count, or he would have flown to meet you on the wings of love," cried Florence, gayly.

"Very flattering, but I should prefer to receive a winged angel in my arms. Where have you hidden Baroness Mignon, mamma-in-law?"

She laughed merrily.

“Be careful with your jokes, friend Valleral. My unnatural daughter is not the person to be lenient toward them.”

“Good gracious—a little spirit of opposition?”

“At least a ‘little spirit’ who always says no, when her frivolous mother says yes. How I come by a daughter so sentimental as Mignon, might serve as a new interesting supplement to modern theories of heredity.”

“Chapter II—with ‘Valleral and Hosanna’ for the first. So this Mignon does not sing of the ‘land where the orange-blossoms grow,’ but of that where ‘skoals’ rage and the reindeer seeks his path with difficulty.”

“Very rightly guessed! A sentimental, grave, thoughtful, Swedish temperament. She takes life as seriously as I take it lightly.”

“I am extremely curious to see the grave lady. Why does she make us wait for her?”

“Not from coquetry. She is bandaging the hand of one of the maids, who cut her hand quite badly in opening a bottle. I think her Samaritan duties will not too long detain her from these as daughter of the house.”

“Samaritan? B-r-r! I never had the necessary comprehension of that.” The count interrupted himself, and turned politely to the door as the other guests began to arrive—several young couples, former devotees of Sophienhof; a countess and her two daughters, who entered the room with all the assurance of those accustomed to drawing-rooms from childhood; a few gay officers—all of whom

passed into the next room to express their sympathy to the poor, afflicted baron.

Valleral kept in the background, and watched the *portières*.

Again they parted.

Mignon appeared.

Involuntarily Cyprian stared at her. Where had he seen this delicate madonna-face before? It seemed as though he had gazed into these eyes before, had seen these lips smile; but where?

Mignon greeted her mother's guests, and bent over the old Countess S.'s hand.

What magnificent blond hair! The heavy knot, low in her neck, shone like spun gold. And he had seen just such beautiful hair before, but where?

The young guests gathered around her, but how strangely contrasted with them was Mignon. Elegantly and fashionably dressed, she yet looked so maidenly and unpretentious beside them. Her figure is still slight and fragile, her manner simple and childish, pleasant but grave.

"Baroness, may I ask you to present me to your daughter?" says Cyprian, drawing near with his accustomed smile of conscious victory.

Mignon glances up at him. What a glance of sweet, shy, lovely embarrassment! She flushes crimson; her delicate lips quiver as though she would speak, but she remains silent.

"She is delicious!" whispers the captain to the baroness, loud enough to be heard.

Count Cyprian had a special scheme for conversing with young girls. He told that he had often,

especially in former days, been condemned to take one of these inexperienced beings in to dinner. Then he either was amused much or ate much, and one was as satisfying as the other.

His first question to such a youthful companion was always: "Do you like to skate and dance?" A question usually answered with a shy yes or no. Then he would tell a nice, suitable anecdote, and watch the effect. If a happy appreciation, then the victory was as good as won; but if her head merely sank lower, with a bashful giggle, and her answer was silence, then Count Lankwitz became more interested in his plate during the course.

Then followed the next attack.

"What pastor confirmed you, Miss X.?"

The head would be raised quickly, the eyes would flash. She would mention the name.

Woe to him! Valleral, as a matter of principle, would attack him, however he contradicted his own convictions in so doing. He would declare the sermons of the clergyman she mentioned vapid, unintellectual and himself too worldly or too orthodox; in short, he would attack the unknown in the fiercest manner.

If this did not help, all was lost. Horrified, the girl would usually forget all shyness, and defend her pastor boldly and enthusiastically. Excitement makes the plainest face attractive, and unconsciously the girl would display all her *naïve*, overflowing little heart.

A glimpse of such a young heart is always interesting. Count Cyprian, greatly entertained, would

gradually begin to yield. In the thought of winning him over to her adored pastor, his little neighbor would become more and more animated, and since he was so handsome and agreeable, the more remorse Valleral showed, the more would her eyes beam.

Inch by inch, he let her conquer ; then, at dessert, would greavely assure her that she had converted him to quite a different opinion. The girl would beam with pride and satisfaction, select the choicest *bonbons* for him, and try to reward him by the greatest graciousness.

In this case, Cyprian had enjoyed himself, and usually made the acquaintance of a dear little girl. But if his maneuver failed, if his opinion of her pastor elicited only an insulted shrug of her shoulders and annihilating silence, then he knew that further efforts were useless here, calmly let her pout and ate his dinner with the best of appetites.

“Kind friend, let me take Mignon in to dinner,” he asked the baroness, who could scarcely believe her ears.

“Impossible, my dear captain. You will bask in the smiles of your hostess.”

“Of course, it must be very hard for you to give me up, baroness,”—said he, teasingly, with one of his irresistible smiles, “but such a sacrifice should not be declined by a mother ; it is for her daughter.”

She struck him playfully with her feather fan.

“You arrogant fellow ! I know no better way to punish you in this moment than by fulfilling your wish.”

“To punish?”

The baroness smiled strangely.

“My daughter will prove to you that she thinks such a sacrifice tiresome and unnecessary. Mignon’s list of favorites at present begins with lieutenants and *descends* to captains.”

“You arouse the lion of vanity in me.”

“Who is always active enough to insnare a mouse, if no noble game is in sight.”

“Your good opinion of me fairly enchants me, baroness.”

“Mocker! Do you not know the fable in which King Lion was the slave of a poor little mouse?”

“I am so fond of being a slave, and am so modest that I will put up with the smallest hand or foot.”

“Very well, if my poor child is willing to take you instead of her charming lieutenant—”

“Opposition would throw an unfortunate light upon her mother’s bringing up.”

“You are right. I am convinced that Mignon will have sufficient reverence for age to bear the unavoidable honor with dignity.”

“But, dear baroness—really you are not so very old—” Valleral looked most innocent, but the baroness, who had already turned away, quickly returned:

“I absolutely did not speak of myself, you ungal-lant man!” said she, laughingly shaking her finger at him. “But if you thought of me it is all the more terrible that you show no more veneration.”

Cyprian crossed his arms with a languishing glance.

"I not only venerate it—I adore it!"

"Good gracious, where?" cried the Baroness von Ohly.

He bent close to her and whispered:

"In wine and cigars."

"Good-for-nothing!" and Mignon's mamma rustled away, horrified.

Mignon blushed deeply as Count Cyprian bowed before her, and with the most gallant words, offered her his arm. She accepted it with an expression of solemn gravity, as it seemed to him, and none too willingly, for Mignon hated anything noticeable. Why had the count made such an unusual request? Was it true, as they said, that he occasionally made a joke of taking young girls in to dinner, and afterwards ridiculing their simplicity and lack of experience?

Two of her young friends had, in confidence, poured out their hearts about Count Cyprian to her, and, strangely enough, one told exactly the same story as the other. Mignon was no average girl. She remembered other, strikingly similar conversations, and drew her own conclusions. Especially as, in secret, the memory of a handsome man, still young despite his gray hair, whose hand had held one of her braids, who had handed her a red rose with such a fascinating glance, was still fresh in her heart.

Mignon was neither shy nor quiet, and would chat very animatedly; but to-night, as she sat beside the captain, she was silent, and only her large, brilliant eyes glanced at him occasionally, questioningly, as

though ready for the expected conflict. Aha, now he turns toward her; now it will be decided.

"Tell me, Miss Mignon, you are probably fond of skating?"

A change comes over the girl's madonna-like face, and her eyes flash.

"Not at all!" says she, dryly. "I am far more enthusiastic over pretty, harmless anecdotes."

The count listens in amazement. Strange! Is he deceived, or did the girl's voice sound ironical? Still he remains unsuspecting.

"Anecdotes? Delightful! I have several fine ones. Which will you hear? The one about the much-tormented lieutenant or the stern boarding-house keeper? Of the ever-thirsty student—"

Valleral suddenly pauses in surprise at the undefinable look on the rosy face.

"If it suits you, Count Lankwitz, I would rather hear your opinion of the pastor who confirmed me," says she, calmly; but her delicate nostrils quiver with suppressed laughter, and although she tries to make her voice sound indifferent, every word is mocking.

The scales suddenly fall from his eyes; for a moment he is speechless, greatly embarrassed, for almost the first time in his life.

Then he leans back in his chair and laughs, laughs more heartily than he has for years. Whether Mignon likes it or the reverse, he seizes her soft little hand and draws it to his lips.

"I have not had such a snub in years," he cries, delightedly, "and I have never before bowed my

head so remorsefully. The deuce ! That was a fine stroke, Miss Mignon. You have stretched me half fainting at your feet ; now be a generous conqueror, and tell me frankly who betrayed to you my plan of war by which usually I conquer."

She shrugs her shoulders, and joins in his laughter.

"Even among girls there is an '*Alliance chifton d'enfant sociale*,' says she, jokingly. "A defensive and offensive alliance in accordance with the demands of modern women, and which exacts equal rights for its youngest as well as its oldest sister. In this case, social equality."

"Good gracious !"

Cyprian leaned forward, his handsome face flushed with interest and amusement.

"Do you read the papers, Miss Mignon?"

"Of course."

"And you swear by the flag of those fair malcontents who, as long as the world exists, can rule the hearts of men, and thus the world, and yet are not satisfied with their power!"

"This power is of too problematical a nature. In this case, woman is like the fetish of the Africans, before which the men bow and do homage until they think it well to thrash it for a change."

Cyprian laughed.

"You refer to barbaric affairs. Cudgels are unknown in Germany, thank fortune."

"Actual ones, yes ; but there are moral ones here as in every land.

"Mention one."

“The injustice and inconsistency with which women are treated.”

“How calmly you utter such long words. Can you illustrate your view with an example?”

“Certainly.” Mignon pushed back a golden curl from her temple, and smiled. She argued without becoming in the least excited or arbitrary. “What inconsistency towards women is displayed by placing them on an equal footing with men in one respect, when it is advantageous for the men—I mean in the matter of taxes—and yet denying them all other rights? Every poor working woman who supports her children by her own hands must pay taxes without hope of pity, for man generously admits a woman can work as industriously as a man. But when any matter affecting the welfare of the whole people is to be decided, she is denied any voice. That is inconsistent. If it is admitted that a woman is capable of supporting a family, and if she pays taxes like a man, she should have the same right that a man has to vote.”

“You forget, Miss Mignon, that we distinguish between very different kinds of work. A woman may, perhaps, hoe potatoes, wash and iron and sew excellently, without having the slightest idea of social matters, politics and the burning topics of the day. A clever hand does not always necessitate brains.”

“And is a peasant who has grown up in the same atmosphere as his wife cleverer and more enlightened than she?”

“In this case, yes. In every village there is a

tavern, and in this tavern politics are discussed. Drivers, travellers, peddlers bring news from the outside world, and the peasant sits and hears them discussed, while his wife is home, cooking and looking after the children, within the narrow bounds that nature has determined for her for centuries."

"Very well, I admit that. Besides, I am convinced that every true woman would prefer such activity to a fight with public opinion. But then one should leave woman to her quiet, unpretentious work, and not overburden her, or, if this must be, then decree: 'Whoever pays taxes is entitled to vote. Those who pay none are not.' That would be just."

Cyprian smilingly shrugged his shoulders.

"Women pay taxes for the civil comforts they enjoy, for protection, order and law. Whoever is a member of a community must pay his or her share. The head of the family is the man."

Involuntarily Mignon glanced at her imposing mother, behind whom Baron Ohly was completely eclipsed.

"You are silent, Miss Mignon, but you look as thoughtful as though my words had not fully convinced you," said Cyprian, his eyes resting with ever-increasing enjoyment upon the bent head of his neighbor, whose face at this moment was as expressive as a song without words.

She smilingly shook her head.

"No, I am not yet convinced."

"Then let us continue the discussion."

"Not now."

"And why not?"

She smiled mischievously.

“Because the present course, if it is to be enjoyed, must be eaten while it is hot.”

Again he laughed more animatedly than in a long time. How charmingly this little thing understood the art of remaining gay and neutral, despite the grave, forbidden theme. He ate the delicacies before him, but very absent-mindedly. At this moment he would have eaten birds' nests without the slightest notice.

“So, then, an ‘*Alliance chiffon d'enfant !*’” he laughed, returning to the beginning of their conversation. “And this aims at the equality of girls with grown women. Delightful! Decidedly the best *fin de siècle* arrangement I have met with. Pray explain it to me. What do the young ladies demand? Eight hours a day of society?”

How well that teasing manner became him! Mignon flushed again slightly.

“Eight hours of such work would probably become unendurable in a short time. No, we *débutantes* fight against a position in society which makes every gentleman think he has a right to ridicule us.”

“You can not possibly make such an assertion from experience?”

“My own experiences begin to-day, with this, my first appearance.”

“Indeed! Then you were regaled with fairy tales?”

“Ah? Are you fond of skating? Do you like to hear anecdotes? Who confirmed you? Those are three questions which one is always perfectly justi-

fied in putting to a strange young lady. Tell me, truly, did you ask my mother them when you met her again at the court ball?"

He laughed again.

"No, Miss Mignon, these questions would be insulting to a lady of your mother's intellectual ability."

"And not to me?"

"No, although now that I have the pleasure of your acquaintance, I should not address them to you."

"And you would ask them of Miss von Thurn and Greta Lisbach, just as before?"

"Without the slightest prick of my conscience."

"Ah! There is the scorn of our girlish existence."

"Do you require me to entertain your friends with scientific and political topics?"

"Yes, did you not me? And is it much of a request that my sisters should enjoy the same recognition as others?"

"We are coming back to the '*Alliance sociale*,'" said Cyprian, smiling. "As, in the great woman question of the time, only a few of the cleverest women are at the head of a grumbling crowd, so you, as an unusually gifted and intelligent young lady, have undertaken the leadership of your girl friends. Do you really believe that *every* woman is capable of study, and occupying a position in the world? A thousand times no! Nature has placed a barrier in woman's delicate physique, which can never be removed. Thousands of women would ruin their health by study and the practice of a profession, and our poor, nervous, miserable generation would be completely enfeebled. But the few women

whose bodies can keep pace with their minds are so rare that an agitation for their sakes is not worth while. They will accomplish their purpose without it, even under present circumstances. And now we will draw a parallel. You just mentioned Miss von Thurn and Greta Lisbach. I will boldly assert that it would be impossible to hold an interesting conversation with these shy and superficial little things."

"Try it!"

"No!"

"And yet you make an assertion?"

"Yes. And for the reason that it was not possible to talk with these ladies on the *simplest* one of my three topics."

"Impossible! They were surely piqued by your manner, and punished you with silence."

"Certainly! And just by that proved their incapacity, and that they had no right to demand anything better. Arrogance is always a sign of foolishness. No one will carry on an intellectual conversation with those ladies, even if they live to become great-grandmothers. But when one is interesting and amusing, even as a mere girl, she will be able to parry these insignificant questions cleverly." Cyprian raised his champagne-glass, giving Mignon a very speaking glance. "And win the respect of every man by her charming conversation. Here's to the '*Alliance chiffon*,' Miss Mignon. You do not need it, for you have conquered even before war was declared."

The glasses clinked, and Mignon's cheeks glowed like crimson roses.



CHAPTER XVIII.

Princess Rafaela was dressing her little son's Christmas-tree herself.

She stood on a stool under the spicy branches, and raised her slender, rounded arms to fasten on all the gilt and silver ornaments that Count Cyril presented to her on a tray.

The slender figure was clad in black velvet, and on her curly hair rested a little widow's cap of white *crêpe*. Her only ornament was a string of rare pearls around her white throat, which rose gracefully from the broad black gauze bertha.

She turned her rosy face toward the young chamberlain.

"Does this angel look well here, or shall it hang higher, count?"

Cyril drew back a step and inspected it.

"Will your highness see for yourself? In my opinion, the pretty little thing is too much hidden by the green."

"Let me decide."

Involuntarily she held out her hand to be helped down from the stool. Cyril stood at her side, her soft, little right hand rested in his, and for a second their eyes met, and each thought of the same moment—that unhappy moment when the loveliest of princesses, a bride, tore her court train from her cavalier's hand.

A deep flush rose to the young widow's cheeks, she glanced up hastily.

“Yes, the angel hangs too low, the wings are entirely hidden. Please try how it looks on the upper branch.”

And then she watched Cyril's hands as they executed her commands. Did they tremble, or was it only the unusual work which made the count awkward? He had trouble in accomplishing his task. Rafaela stole a glance at his face. Each day she marveled afresh at the change in it.

She did not understand how she could ever have disliked him or thought him eccentric. The repellent, misanthropical look of the past had given way to a pleasant gravity, and he seemed charmingly just to and considerate of his fellow-men. It was even said that the count's latest hobby was to make himself the zealous defendant of all whom society condemned.

How did it happen that her child had such a tender, passionate liking for this grave, quiet man? He is the only one of whom Rafaela is not jealous, and with whom she is willing to share Carl Henry's love.

“It is well that we have so many little angels to

adorn the tree," said Cyril, busy fastening the little winged dolls. "The prince is especially fond of them, and will be much pleased."

"You have made him love the Christmas angel by your pretty stories, the angel and his mother in one person," replied the princess, gently, "and no one appreciates that better than I. Oh, Count Lankwitz," she continued, warmly, "how much I have to thank you for. It is the first tree I have ever dressed for my child. Often it seems like a dream to me that the little one really loves me so tenderly. Hear him now, calling at the door: 'Mamma, mamma!' The little fellow is curious, and oh, it is so hard for me not to bring him in! But I must take him a few *bonbons*." And happy as a child herself, the princess rushed out of the room, and on the other side of the door, Cyril heard her laughing and petting the little prince.

He drew a deep breath. How indescribably sweet it would be to be a spectator of such happiness! Rafaela returned. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes shone with happiness.

"Oh, he is so happy, count!" she cried. "And he persists that mamma must be the Christmas angel to-night and bring him all his pretty things from the Christ-child."

The young chamberlain drew a step nearer.

"Your highness, I, too, have a great Christmas wish on my heart."

She listened delightedly.

"Anything, anything! Pray, speak, my dear count."

"In the sense of the little prince, I would fain beg you to be this evening, in the child's eyes, the bright form he looks for. Do not prove the tale I told him false. Wear a white gown to-night, and let him still imagine his mother is the angel which looks and words so often prove her."

Rafaela had bowed her head.

"Leave off mourning for the first time! Wear a white gown for the first time," she whispered. That is a surprising suggestion, and yet—yet, you are right, count. For the child's sake. He must not lose his belief in your kind words."

She glanced at the tall figure almost hesitatingly, and continued still more softly:

"Henry is so fond of you. And nothing must shake his love. The child has so very much to atone for his mother. Forgive me for his sake," she added, holding out her hand.

Cyril started, and for a moment his face was deathly pale. Rafaela did not see it. He stooped and kissed her hand. When he raised his head again his face wore a tortured look.

"Forgive! What have I to forgive, your highness?" he gasped. "In all humility, I have to beg you to forgive whatever in my mad delusion I—"

"Count Cyril, we were both foolish children. We obstinately clutched the thorns, and trod the roses under our feet."

He shook his head in his old gloomy way.

"I was a poor, weak creature, mentally and physically ill, blind and deaf, wandering on a false path. This is Christmas eve, a feast of kindness and

charity, your highness. Do not let me go away empty-handed, among all those who are bidden peace on earth. Let me be certain that you will forgive and forget all that I have ever done."

Her large, astonished eyes rested anxiously upon his flushed, excited face.

"Good heavens, how strangely you speak, count! What has happened? What have you done to me that I have not done to you? We mutually vexed each other, and made life hard. That is no crime, and I have long, long ago forgiven you that."

For a moment Cyril struggled with himself. His pulses throbbed feverishly; he felt that this was the right moment to throw himself at her feet and confess all. There, beneath the Christmas-tree branches, surely she would forgive him. He opened his lips; his hands pressed together in passionate conflict—when there was a knock at the door. Too late!

The princess turned her head, and Cyril drew back with a sigh. A lady-in-waiting appeared, followed by a lackey, who carried a large object, wrapped in white tissue-paper.

"Pardon, your highness, if we venture into this mysterious Christmas room, despite your commands," said Miss von Riegnitz. "But here, the guilty cause is Count Cyprian Lankwitz."

Cyril raised his head suddenly, but the princess went toward the lackey in astonishment.

"Captain Lankwitz? What about him?"

Miss Lola laughingly waved both hands at the package. "He sent this veiled picture to Soph-

ienhof, and when we sent it back to him, your highness, with the message that your highness had given strict orders that no presents be received in Sophienhof, he sent it a second time, with the laconic note: 'In accordance with her highness's wish, which is a command to me.'"

"Strange! It must be one of his charming jokes. Do you not suspect what it may be, Count Cyril?"

The young chamberlain shrugged his shoulders. "I regret that I am not informed, your highness," said he, in a hoarse voice.

"Shall we open it, your highness?" asked Miss von Riegnitz, excitedly as a child.

"There is nothing else to be done, if I wish to learn what my own wish and command is." Rafaela smilingly drew near, and the lackey and Miss Lola hastily removed the wrapping.

"Ah! Choice flowers! They form the frame! A picture—a beautiful pastel! Turn it toward the light, Jean! What a magnificent castle! What does it represent, your highness?"

The princess stared speechlessly at the flower-framed picture.

"Here comes No. 2—the pendant. Almost more beautiful than the first. That is beautiful, but quite unfamiliar to me."

"Yes, quite unfamiliar!" Rafaela blushed to the roots of her curly hair. "Count Cyril, do you know these castles? Are they Neudeck and Soldau?"

Cyril slowly approached the little group.

"Yes, your highness, our old family possessions," said he, dully. And his eyes rested as though in

frightened question upon her blushing, embarrassed-looking face. "How comes my father by such a strange idea? Is it all a mistake!"

Rafaela hastily shook her head.

"No, no—I remember now—I expressed a wish to see the castles—but—but—I did not fancy that your very charming father—" In her embarrassment she stooped and touched a flower—a spray of orange-blossoms caught in the lace of her sleeve. She loosened it, and fastened it in her gown. "Put the pictures here, in these two chairs, Jean, so, and now I ask you to leave me alone. It is already growing dusk, and I wish to arrange the playthings for Henry quite alone." She had gone to the window, and stared out, only giving a slight nod as Lola and Cyril left the room with a bow.

She was alone. Quickly she turned, glanced around the room, then went up to one of the pictures—Castle Soldau!

Her cheeks were still deeply flushed, and the flush deepened the longer her gaze rested upon the pastel.

How long she had wished to see his home! Cyril had grown up here; behind these walls he had lived for years; here he would take the wife of his choice some day, to a life of secluded happiness, or so at least it was said he had told the duke, as reason for not desiring a career.

Here! How happy one might be in this idyllic old castle!

From this tower-room there would surely be the most beautiful view of the mountains. One could

look far down into the valley, for Castle Soldau lies on high ground. One could watch the foamy river rushing by, and the eye could wander for miles over the dark forest.

Yes, here life would be beautiful for two who loved each other. Whom would he choose some day?

Rafaela drew a deep breath, and passed her hand over her forehead, as though to banish foolish thoughts.

“Alas they could ne’er come together,
The waters were far too deep—”

Poor princess, how far removed from all happiness; how solitary thou art!

The shadows deepen in the room. It seems as though invisible hands drew a dark veil over Castle Soldau.

The princess still stands before it in deep thought. It was very charming in the captain to send her the pictures. Surely her most pleasant gift; and yet—if only Cyril had not been at her side! He had seen her confusion. He had gazed so penetratingly at her face. Suppose he should fathom her interest in his home, and conclude that her friendship for him was more deeply rooted than was apparent!

Rafaela pressed her little hands to her throbbing temples and smiled mournfully. No, Count Cyril does not think of love—that feeling does not exist in his calm, cold-blooded heart. He will marry some day from a sense of duty, but he will never know a true passion—nothing could be further from his whole nature.

No, Cyril does not suspect that Rafaela wished to see Castle Soldau for his sake. She bends close down to the flowery frame, then, with fairly feverish zeal, begins to arrange the playthings for Carl Henry under the spicy fir branches.

Meanwhile, Count Cyril stands in the next room, at the high window, and stares out into the twilight of the park. He is absent-minded. So absent-minded that even the little prince turned from him and followed his English governess out of the room.

Miss Lola had turned curiously to Cyril when the princess dismissed them both.

"Count Lankwitz, if this is the first Christmas surprise of her highness and your father, what will be the second?" said she with a meaning smile, humming a few bars of the wedding march from "*Lohengrin*."

The young chamberlain's eyes flashed so threateningly upon the indiscreet young lady that Lola paused in alarm. He silently shrugged his shoulders and turned his back upon her.

Then, piqued, she turned on her heel, and drew Carl Henry's governess down on a sofa beside her, where they whispered and murmured over this latest bit of news, until the governess is called from the room, when Miss Lola, with a malicious glance at the "schoolmaster in the chamberlain's uniform" seats herself at the piano and begins to thump out one Christmas carol after another.

It seems to disturb him but little, for he stares out at the winter landscape as calmly as though he were really as unsuspecting as he pretends.

Lola cannot bear the count, since he ignores all

her coquetries, and always frowns upon any scandal repeated to him. What business has he here, since her highness has returned to Sophienhof? They have persuaded the princess that Carl Henry can not live without him, and so she summons him on all occasions. Perhaps the child is but the pretext, and the stern Hosanna must play the *postillon d'amour*, until time and public opinion permit "Madam Potiphar" to bring home her "chaste Joseph."

Lola bangs the keys more and more fiercely, and when the electric lights are turned on and Cyril calmly picks up a book and seats himself at one end of the room, Miss von Riegnitz closes the piano and leaves.

* * * * *

The lights burn on the Christmas-tree, and Carl Henry, clinging in trembling excitement to Cyril's hand, enters the room, staring with great, delighted eyes at his young mother, who hurries to meet him.

Behind a thick screen of evergreens, some choir boys sing Christmas carols, and before the little prince stands a radiant form—Rafaela.

"Yes—now you are really the angel!" cries the child, with flushed cheeks, and throws his little arms around her.

Soft folds of white silk envelop the princess's form. A golden girdle confines them at her waist, and in her curly hair, she wears a little gold crown with a diamond star.

"You dear lovely, Christmas angel!" cried the child, smiling rapturously.

Rafaela's young face shines with happiness; it is beautiful to see her as she leads her little son to the tree.

The Christmas carols are ended, and the room resounds with the little prince's joyous cries. Rafaela hurries hither and thither, bringing all present up to her surprise table.

She also comes up to Cyril. He does not look as happy as usual; there are dark shadows beneath his eyes. She gives him a bewitching smile.

"Formerly, as a child, I bestowed an order upon a Lankwitz," says she, jestingly. "To-day, I am too old for such acts of self-will. I can only bestow decorations of thanks and friendship. Take this, count, and in after years remember the delightful stories which you used to tell my son of his mother."

She places a small case in his hand, and waits for him to open it. With trembling fingers, Cyril does so, and a faint cry of delight comes from his very heart. A picture in the form of a medallion, framed in sapphires and diamonds, representing the princess as an angel, clad in white, with golden wings on her shoulders, and holding a twig of evergreen in her hand.

"Your highness," he stammers, and again, "Your highness!" She has never seen such a look in his eyes before. She holds out her hand confusedly. He presses it almost roughly to his burning lips.

"But now I seriously beg you to keep your promise, Rafaela," says the duke's voice behind her. "You took a fancy that you would not hand me your list of wishes until this evening, and assured

me that I could fulfill them on the spot. Now, then, where is the paper?"

The princess smilingly handed him a little envelope, and while the duke opened it, Renée and Princess Hermine leaned over his shoulder with eager interest.

All laugh heartily.

"Good gracious, you are partly very modest, partly very pretentious, in your demands, little sister!" cries the duke, evidently pleased. "But you forget that I am not a despot, that I cannot dispose of the bodies and souls of my subjects. Here, my dear Lankwitz! This paper interests you. The princess begs Count Lankwitz as tutor for her son. You have something to say in connection with that, eh?"

The young chamberlain grows dizzy. He does not know what answer he makes, he only knows that he kisses the princess's hand again, raises the delighted prince in his arms, and buries his face in the child's soft, golden curls.

Yes, it is Christmas, and a voice seems to murmur to his heart: "Peace on earth." But hark! A shrill discord which cuts his heart like a two-edged sword.

"No, Rafaela, as yet I have not obtained the slightest information in regard to the pseudonym," says the duke, behind him. "Strangely enough, I was fully convinced that an estate like the Bahrenberg estate would burst even the most mysterious seven seals."

"So this hope is crushed again!" How harsh and bitter sounds Rafaela's sweet voice!

"Are you really so anxious to find out who the



"WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?"—See Page 212.

person is who so mortally insulted you as the author of 'Madam Potiphar?' I thought you had become quite calm."

Cyril does not see the princess's face. He only sees how passionately she clasps her hands.

"Oh, Henry, I would give half my life to find it out!"

Lankwitz draws back into a window recess, and buries his face in his hands with a groan.

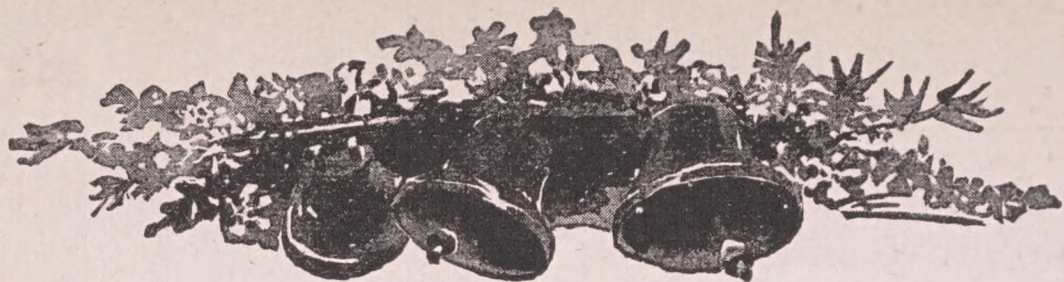
"Oh, God, let this be enough punishment!" his heart cries out. "I have sinned, but I have also atoned! The angels promise me peace and happiness at Christmas time, and yet they drive me back again and again from the entrance of Paradise!" He set his teeth in passionate agony. A few hours before the confession of his fault had trembled on his lips. He had wished frankly to confess all to Rafaela, and now? Her picture burns like fire upon his heart.

Shall he sacrifice all, give up all that makes him partially happy? Now, now when she herself has called him to be near her, when he saw her eyes shine so strangely—

No, a thousand times no! Rather die than lose her friendship now. He cannot. He would break his heart if he must be torn from her.

In this hour he knows that his lips must be sealed forever. And he will carry his secret to the grave with him. He can bear everything but her disfavor.

Love which can make a hero of a man also makes him a coward and slave of his passion.



CHAPTER XIX.

Count Cyprian was a remarkably frequent guest in the Ohly house.

At first he did not try to account for the charm that attracted him there, but soon he discovered that his thoughts were greatly occupied with Mignon's unusual, fresh, young self, and all the more the more opportunity he had to become better acquainted with her.

She was decidedly different from most girls of her age. Very reserved, without being stiff, grave and yet with occasional flashes of roguishness which were all the more charming in contrast with her usual gravity.

Cyprian became deeply interested to discover whether he was still capable of making an impression upon this young girl's heart.

He remembered with great pleasure that young girls often have an especial liking for men considerably their seniors. His mirror told him that gossip was right in calling him the "ever young and handsome." His slightly gray hair made him, if possible, more interesting; scarcely a wrinkle disfigured his handsome features, and many ladies, old and

young, raved over him. Why should Mignon Ohly alone prove an exception?

She did not betray by the slightest sign that his coming and going interested her more than that of any other. At first she had often blushed, without especial cause, down to her white throat when he spoke to her or looked at her unexpectedly, but she seemed to have noticed that he often made use of this trick to watch her, and became more and more shy and reserved.

Besides this, the count still impatiently racked his brains to think where he had seen Mignon before, or whom she so strikingly resembled. It was a fleeting recollection, but it annoyed him that he could not place it, especially the beautiful golden hair. Yet all his thinking was in vain.

As the season had been very quiet on account of the court mourning, Baroness Ohly, at the wish of many friends, had arranged a series of evenings for reading modern and classical plays. This evening they were to run over several one-act farces, and Cyprian remembered that some years before he had once played the *rôle* of lover in one of these. He must still possess the copy of this *rôle*, and had promised to look for it among all the faded souvenirs of his writing-desk.

So he sat in the fading winter afternoon light at his desk and drew out one souvenir after another, amusing himself at sight of some long-forgotten ones.

He smoked an excellent Havana and hummed to himself a merry tune:

"It is astonishing what a quantity of billets-doux and keepsakes one person can accumulate," he said to himself, knocking the ashes from his cigar, as he opened an elegant portfolio filled with papers.

"What have we here? All the notes of what seems to have been an unusually gay season. Strange writing—a lady's writing. The deuce! Baroness Ohly! What does this mean?"

A flush rises to his face as he reads, and an exclamation as joyous as that of any boy escapes his lips; then he laughs with radiant eyes, as he has not laughed for a long time. A kiss, a pledged kiss from Mignon! This discovery is worth millions! And he had wholly forgotten this delightful pledge! Incomprehensible!

The captain sprang up and paced the room excitedly. A kiss from Mignon! Shall he claim it? Yes, indeed, at any price!

Valleral had kissed many women in his life, but never such lips as Mignon's. He will be the first butterfly to sip the dew from this blossom, and no one shall deprive him of this privilege. The captain has not been so excited for years.

It seems to him that his heart beats more rapidly than such an elderly heart should, at thought of Mignon's kiss. Shall he ask permission? Nonsense! He will surprise her, and only after the deed is accomplished will he show his important document.

Then his friend, Florence, will laugh, and call him a "dreadful man;" but she will forgive him. And Mignon? She will blush like a rose; she will

hang her head, and perhaps fly like a shy roe ; but she will not be really angry, for, so far, all women have been more than willing that Valleral should kiss them.

She will dream of this kiss, and as often as she sees her rosy lips in the mirror, she will think of the first kiss imprinted upon them.

Cyprian will see that she is not angry too long. Hastily he consults his watch. It is high time for him to dress. With nervous haste he throws the papers, dried flowers, handkerchiefs, gloves and other things back into the drawers of his desk, and rings for his valet.

"Hey, my Figaro," he cries to the man, "show what you can do now. Use your arts to make of the old captain a young lieutenant. It is very necessary to-day, Moulin."

Moulin smiles, and flatters his master with all the refinement of a Parisian valet.

When the count drove up to the Ohly villa, the butler opened the door in some surprise.

"Well, am I too early?" laughed Cyprian.

"The ladies have not yet entered the drawing-room, count. It just struck half-past seven."

"The devil! Are the rooms lighted?"

"Of course, count, everything is ready."

"Good! Do not announce me. I will wait here patiently until the ladies appear."

"Yes, sir!"

The man threw open the folding doors, and Cyprian entered the warm, perfumed, brightly-lighted suite of rooms, quite willing to have an opportunity

of examining at his ease all the treasures which "Friend Florence" had collected during her travels.

A thousand and one elegant trifles. A modern drawing-room has no style unless it is that of the frequent international exhibitions.

Cyprian thoughtfully walks through the rooms. He knows them all, but here, here at the end, next the baroness's *boudoir*, a door stands half open.

"I do not remember this room," thinks the captain, peeping cautiously through the *portières*.

There is no one there. A rose-shaded lamp casts a dreamy, soft light over the delightful little room, which is furnished in rococo style, with pink-flowered satin, filmy draperies, Meissen porcelain statuettes, palms and flowers, together with sketches and cheap little articles, evidently relics of boarding-school days.

Aha, Mignon's mysterious realm! The inevitable writing-desk, so loaded with ornaments that there is room for anything but writing, stands near a window, and, good gracious, souvenirs!

There must be some trait in human nature to explain why memory loves to cling to tangible objects. Bunches of artificial flowers, little glass slippers, new year's cards, vases and last, not least, numerous pictures of very young ladies. Oh sacred "*alliance chiffon d'enfant!*" you, too, demand your rights of the world!

"It is delightful to be able to rummage undisturbed in such a treasure trove; only, unfortunately, there is no diary in sight. I have no scruples or honor when a boarding-school diary is in question.

Ah—matters become more poetic. A red rose, framed, with a date beneath— Good heavens, this is serious! ‘September 1st, 18—!’ This date seems familiar to me. Let us see! September 1st, the year of the princess’s marriage. The deuce, yes, on the 1st of September I returned to the capital and saw the unhappy entrance of the young couple. And this red rose—” Cyprian suddenly raised his head and stared at it. “Is it possible that it could have been Mignon! Of course, of course. Fool that I was, was I blind that I did not recognize her? The braids which enslaved me—her lovely eyes! Mignon, actually Mignon!”

The captain excitedly sat down before the writing-desk and took the little frame in his hand.

His rose! A sudden great joy overcame the man. “Delightful of the sweet girl! Really, that is fairly touching. She keeps the rose here as a souvenir of me—of me! And donkey that I am, I did not recognize her! Infamous!” Mechanically he turned the frame over. There was a verse written on the back:

“Once more gladly would I meet thee
And into thy dear eyes gaze;
But whate’er my fate, always,
Oh, dear heart, I’ll bless and greet thee!”

Cyprian became quite overcome with delight. This was a surprise. Won, won at sight! He really did not care to have it made so easy for him, and it was just Mignon’s reserve which had so attracted him. Still, it flattered his vanity, and it is always pleasant to know that one is loved.

Now he will certainly kiss her. Now he need fear absolutely nothing. Valleral puts the frame carefully back in its place, and hastily leaves the room, for he thinks he hears Baroness Ohly's laughing voice.

Unfortunately, several of the members of the reading-circle have sent regrets. There are but four other guests beside Count Cyprian. They chat for a while over their tea; now they sit in their hostess's *boudoir*, and, after assigning rôles, begin to read a comedy.

Count Lankwitz is more hilarious than usual, and friend Florence frequently has to call him to order.

"Why, count! What are you reading? That is not in the book!"

"Ha, ha! He is improving upon the classics!"

"Famous! That joke was worth more than the the whole play!"

This from the guests.

"Hush! Now he becomes lyric. He even sings."

"Dreadful! My dear baron, pray take the book from him."

"Miss Mignon, I would be vexed if I were you. He sings that song to you!"

"Pardon. He is supposed to be thinking of his 'sweet Lilly,' of whom I am only the echo!" The young girl laughs. She sits near the blazing wood fire, which throws a red light on her hair.

"If I only knew whether the before-mentioned Lilly had such magnificent braids as the sweet Mignon," sighs Cyprian, with a speaking glance. "For the sake of such braids I would even be a

modern Laocoön and let myself be hopelessly entangled in the bright serpents."

Mignon blushed, and her mother rapped on the table with her fan.

"Nonsense! Lilly is white as snow and black as ebony. Now, go on reading! Finish your monologue, count. It becomes more and more sentimental. You see a lady approaching from a distance, you hear again the long-sought siren voice singing: 'O press thy cheek against my cheek!'"

"Go on, baroness. Sing so that you may aid my imagination: 'O press thy ear against my ear.'"

"Good for nothing! I propose that we give it up for this evening. The captain is in such a mood that he absolutely can not enter into the spirit of his *rôle*."

Then there was a period of general amusement.

"You wrong me, baroness. You shall see that I am heart and soul in it. Now then, I rush forward—"

"Stop! For mercy's sake do not upset the table."

"I cry joyously: 'Mignon, sweet Mignon, have I found you at last? You, the mysterious singer, at whose feet, on the 1st of September, I threw the red rose—'"

"Nonsense! Your charmer's name is Lilly. No improvisations, if you please!"

Baroness von Ohly said it laughingly, much amused at Cyprian's gayety, but Mignon suddenly seemed petrified, and stared at the speaker with great, wide-opened eyes.

Valleral's eyes were fixed on her crimson face. He continued, with passionate gesticulation :

"I open my arms passionately—"

"That is crossed out ; keep away !"

"I throw them around the startled girl—"

"For Heaven's sake, count, are you crazy?"

A faint, horrified cry, which is drowned in the universal tumult.

Cyprian had suited the action to the word ; he had sprung up, caught Mignon in his arms, and kissed her trembling lips.

Half fainting from fright, the young girl sinks back into her chair, but Florence stands drawn up to her full height, incapable of a word, as are all the others.

"Count Lankwitz—that—that was infamous!" comes finally from the baroness's lips. She looks highly insulted and indignant.

The captain turns to her with a beaming face, and humbly folds his hands.

"Not infamous, dear lady, it was simply my right !"

"Your right !" Florence's voice is very sharp.

Instead of replying, Cyprian draws a folded paper from his pocket and hands it to her, with eyes dancing with mirth.

The baroness glances at it, flushes and bites her lips. Then she laughs, at first faintly and embarrassedly, then more loudly, and evidently is conciliated.

"I certainly never suspected such a trick, and, in spite of my indignation, must declare myself power-

less. Horrible, count! Such a good memory and redemption of a pledge are not gentlemanly."

"But intoxicatingly sweet and agreeable," declared the captain, seizing the speaker's two hands and drawing them to his lips. His face is deeply flushed. "You will forgive me, will you not?" he pleads softly.

"Unfortunately I have no right to be angry," laughs Florence, hastily freeing her hands, and holding out the paper to the astonished spectators. "Here, friends, look, listen!"

She reads aloud the bold words which, years before, at supper at a court ball, had been written on this paper.

Stormy applause is paid this trick of Valleral, and the captain, doubly encouraged, turns to Mignon and tries to draw her hands to his lips, giving her a most meaning glance.

But she draws them violently away. She has risen, and stands beside her chair, her lovely face so colorless that Cyprian gazes at her in alarm.

Then their eyes meet. Never has the count gazed into such a pair of beautiful, flashing, furious eyes before. All her deeply wounded pride, indignation and shame lie reflected in them, and they fill with tears. She tries to speak, her lips quiver in vain. Then she turns her back upon the offender and has left the room before any one can detain her.

"Good heavens, count, what have you done!" cries Florence, anxiously. "Mignon is not the person to play such jokes upon. She is mortally insulted, and possibly will tell her poor, sick father

strange tales of what is going on down here in the drawing-room."

Cyprian stands motionless, his eyes still fixed upon the door behind which the young girl has disappeared. His handsome face wears an expression never seen there before.

" "With her thorns did prick the rose," said he, smiling, and drawing a deep breath. " "Vain were all his cries and woes, for he then must bear it." " And once more bowing over the baroness's hand with somewhat excited gayety, he assured her: "Do not worry, my lady, it shall be my task to appease your charming little one, that no shadow may rest upon this hour. Early to-morrow. I beg your protection and help in the necessary peace preliminaries. Now I will leave the field, before Miss Mignon calls up a storm of indignation around my head. *Au revoir*," he bent his radiant face quite near and whispered: "Dearest mamma-in-law."





CHAPTER XX.

Count Cyprian had not waited for his carriage, but hurried home on foot. The valet evidently had not expected his master before midnight, for he was away, and the captain entered his smoking-room, which was lighted only by the reflection of the street lamp opposite.

This dim light was to his taste. He removed his overcoat and threw himself upon a divan. His head burned, his pulses seemed on fire. He pressed his face against the sofa pillows like a love-sick boy, and laughed :

“Valleral, crazy fellow, what have you done?”

Cyprian had kissed so many women in his life, but now all kisses are forgotten for those innocent, pure lips. How proudly her eyes had flashed ! It seemed to the man that he had suddenly left behind him the noise and dust of the streets, and entered a church upon whose altar stood the stainless lilies of innocence. An indescribable longing fills his heart, a longing for the paradise of pure love.

Is he justified in asking that of fate ? Can and

dare he, a man at the turning-point of life, stretch out his arms for young spring?

Unlike! Mignon, the budding blossom; he, the tree in autumn, through whose branches so many storms have howled! Unlike, they are too unlike, and yet: "Only in love can unlike mate with unlike." Yes, the sharpest contrasts can be blended by the enchantress love.

The captain rises and presses the electric button which turns on the light, sits down, and in nervous haste writes a letter to Mignon's parents, asking for the hand of their daughter.

They will be an unlike couple. Dame Gossip will wring her hands, but the captain will defy her and ask: "Have you forgotten the bright arch that connects heaven and earth? Love is its name."

What a state of feverish excitement the count was in all that night and the next day! He paced his rooms restlessly as a caged lion. Every ring at the door bell made him start; no day had ever seemed so long.

At last! Late in the evening the valet brings a letter to his master. The man's black eyes are fixed on the count's flushed face, for he suspects that this letter contains important news.

Cyprian's hands tremble with excitement as he opens the elegant envelope. He had never thought it possible he could feel thus.

He reads. At first the letters dance before his eyes, then suddenly they grow distinct, and he reads. Impossible! Unheard of! He, Count Cyprian Lankwitz has been rejected! Slowly he

sinks down into an armchair and stares at the graceful writing in which Florence communicates to him the hopeless fact that, unfortunately, her silly, obstinate little girl could not be induced to say yes. Neither representations nor coaxing could shake her in her resolution.

No reason was given for Mignon's refusal. Only at the close the baroness remarked that it was very necessary that the count consider such a step carefully, as an old proverb truly said :

“Race, lands and years in equal share,
Will ever make the happiest pair.”

For a moment Cyprian felt as though his hopes had been shipwrecked, and as though the waves were dashing over his head. But only for a moment ; then he sprang up and threw his head back proudly. Now Mignon is a thousand times dearer to him than before, and if he had only felt before that he loved her, now he longed for her with all his passionate heart.

Resistance is just what he had never encountered before, and it spurs him on to fresh ventures. He rings the bell violently, and orders his overcoat and hat. He will learn for himself why Mignon spurns him. He is not offended or angry ; no, he whistles to himself, with a smile on his face, and as he walks hastily through the mild, damp air, he even notices how suddenly the weather has changed. Why should it not ? Has not one night sufficed to change his whole heart ? Where yesterday, with cool calculation and worldly wisdom, the hand of a princess was his sole aim, the capricious god of love has

to-day enthroned in his heart a young girl, who has overthrown all other idols.

Cyprian rings the bell of the Ohly villa violently.

The baroness had not wished to receive any more visitors that evening, but the count's plea of urgent business obliged the butler to announce him.

Florence, in an elegant silk house gown, rises from her chair near the fire, tosses aside a book, and comes to meet the captain with outstretched hands.

"*Pauvre diable !*" says she, laughing in her careless way. "Do you come to weep with me over the ruins of Carthage?"

He kisses her hand.

"Heaven forbid!" says he, jestingly. "The Carthage of my hopes is not yet in ruins. On the contrary, the commander advances to take the hostile territory by storm."

"Oh, you credulous innocent!"

"This painful sigh which doubts my success assures me that the mother-in-law is already won."

"But if she is your sole booty, you are in a double sense defeated," laughed Florence.

Cyprian teasingly shrugged his shoulders.

"Why dwell upon this most terrible of possibilities? My circumstances would never permit me such extravagance."

"This is the leading up to your pecuniary affairs," cried she, amused, and leaning forward, added in a sepulchral whisper: "Have you debts?"

He nodded with droll gloominess, and wrung his hands.

“Unhappy man, how many?”

He fairly cringed at thought of the sum he was about to name.

“One dollar and thirty-five cents to my barber for cologne,” he murmured dully.

“Spendthrift!” With a crushing glance the baroness took out her pocketbook. “There, pay your debts, and appear before my husband with head erect, and see if you can win him.”

She rose and was about to ring, but Cyprian seized her hands and drew them to his lips.

“Oh, you angel—”

“Do not prevaricate so!”

“There are bad angels.”

“Oh, truly. Pardon. Well, what do you want?”

“Let me not see your husband first. It will be better for Mignon and me to ask his blessing together.”

“You wish to declare your love personally to my little girl?”

“I should like to try and correct the poor taste she has shown in not accepting me.”

“Very well. I will let matters take their own course!” cried Florence, and ringing the bell, she said to the butler: “Ask Baroness Mignon to come here, but do not say that a guest is present.”

The door opened, and Mignon hastily entered. She wore a plain, blue cloth gown, and glanced first at the lounge. Seeing this unoccupied, she looked around the room in surprise. The lights were heavily shaded, and it was an instant before she caught sight of Cyprian’s handsome, smiling face.

The young girl started slightly, then threw her

head back proudly, while her lovely Madonna face wore a more scornful, repellent look than Lankwitz would have thought possible.

“Good evening, my dear Miss Mignon.”

His gay tone seemed almost ironical, and she flushed hotly, bowed slightly, and started to leave the room.

“A moment, Miss Mignon!”

More quick than she, he stood at her side, barring her exit.

“You owe me an answer which I am justified in asking.”

She freed her fingers energetically.

“An answer?” said she, with flashing eyes.

“Has not my mother given it to you?”

He drew up a chair.

“Let us sit down. The discussion promises to be lengthy,” said he with a smile, but she remained standing, her whole face expressing opposition.

“An answer is quickly given. I am in a hurry.”

“So much the better! Tell me very quickly that your mother’s letter was a great mistake, and that you love me as hugely as I love you, Mignon.”

He went up to her with outstretched hands, although she drew back angrily.

“Did mamma call me here to expose me once more to your insults, Count Lankwitz? I forbid your jests, which you should not permit yourself to make to a school-girl, far less to me!”

“Jests?” He frowned slightly. “I stand before you in all earnestness, and wish to prove this to you.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“So much the worse if you can compromise a lady in all earnestness. As you mention my mother’s letter, I know that you have received my answer, and think further conversation unnecessary.”

Again she turned to the door, but she paused involuntarily when Cyprian called her name shortly, almost imperatively.

He came to her side. The smile had left his face, his eyes flashed threateningly, they were so changed that Mignon gazed at him in surprise.”

“The answer which I desire you have not yet given me. When a man asks for a girl’s hand, when he gives her his whole heart and life and love, he is justified in demanding confidence in return. To refuse an offer of marriage is no child’s play, and a suitor may at least ask a reason for his rejection. You refused me without giving a reason, and I am here to learn this reason.”

He had spoken loudly and violently, and during the words Mignon had stood proudly erect. Excitement drove the blood to her cheeks; she could scarcely control her passionate irritation sufficiently to give him the desired information.

“When a man gives a girl his whole heart and life and love!” cried she, bitterly. “Yes, *then* he may expect a different answer. But I think the manner of such a man would be different from yours, count. You ask a reason for my refusal? Good, you shall hear it! If I ever engage myself to a man”—she flushed still more deeply—“I expect

first of all of him that he woo me properly, with chivalric honor and the necessary respect. I do not wish to be my husband's plaything, his baby and pastime. I insist that, above all things, he treat me with respect, and not as a foolish child to whom one owes neither respect nor devotion."

"Is this a complaint against me? Have I possibly not treated you in the right manner?"

"You? Me?" came like a horrified cry from her lips. "No, I am convinced that you would never have permitted yourself to take such liberties with a lady whom you respected. In a mood, which reminds one of a champagne intoxication, you join our circle, jesting and parodying in a manner which certainly would not lead one to think you seriously in love. When a man recites verses as you did, and then suddenly clasps his neighbor in his arms and kisses her, no deep emotion is the cause; on the contrary, he has mocked her most flippantly, because—because my youth did not seem worth your respect. Your offer of marriage was to atone for the liberty you had taken with a girl, when under the influence of wine, and the girl sent you the only possible answer. So we are quits. Now you know the reason of my refusal, and I hope will annoy me no longer."

She had spoken with increasing violence. Cyprian's eyes had rested delightedly upon her proud face. He had flushed at her words, and bit his lips in sudden confusion, but his face had brightened more and more, and now Valleral's old humor shone in the eyes, so grave a moment before.

“I thank you for your frankness, Miss Mignon, and thank you for the sweet confession which, unconsciously, you have just made. Man cannot fight against his nature, and the love which makes other people sentimental, perhaps, or pathetic and mournful, with me bubbles up like the best champagne. And I love you, Mignon. I love you with all my heart, and I will prove this to you, because you love me too.”

She had turned her face away ; now she gazed at him with her old defiance.

“I do not love you. Who dares say that?”

He bent forward with such a fascinating glance that she hastily averted her eyes.

“You, yourself, Mignon !” said he, gently. “The reason you give for refusing me comes from your pride. You are still too distrustful and revolutionary a member of the ‘*Alliance chiffon d'enfant*.’ Your heart had nothing whatever to do with the refusal you sent me, for instead of the long story that your offended pride told me, your heart would simply have bid you tell me : ‘I will not marry you, because I do not love you.’ But you did not say that, Mignon, because you could not lie, and because the red rose on your writing-desk would at once have contradicted you.”

She started so violently that her hand grasped the silken *portières*.

“That rose?” she stammered. “What has that rose to do with you?”

“I gave it to you, and you kept it as a souvenir of me, Mignon !” How near he bent down toward

her, how tightly he clasped her hand! A sudden fear overcame her. She does not surrender so easily. With a sudden movement she freed her hand.

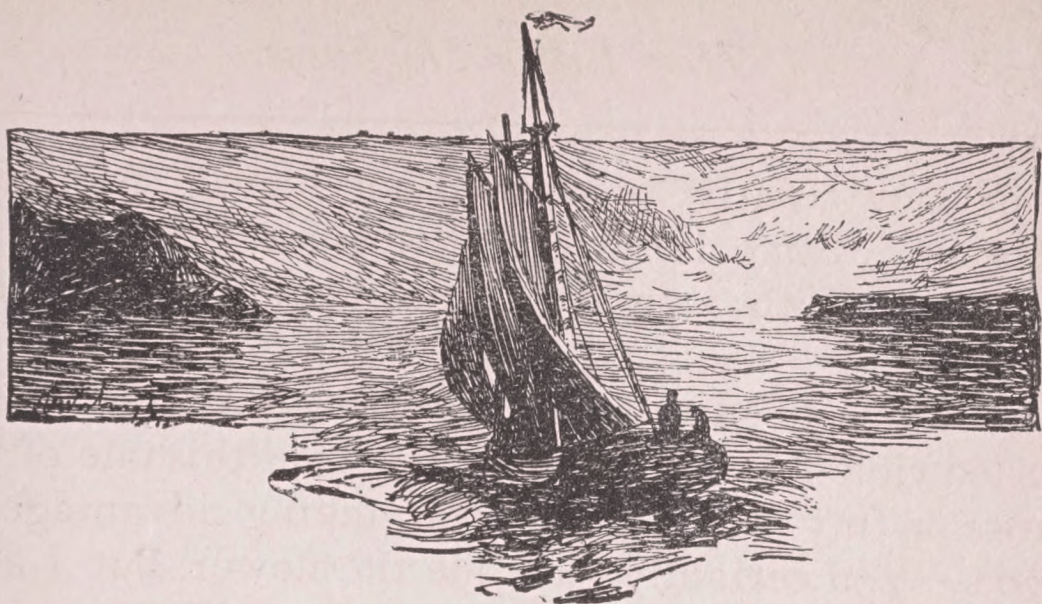
"As a souvenir of you? What a false idea!" she cried violently. "Whoever told you this tale of the rose on my writing-desk was taking advantage of you. You certainly gave me the flower, but I kept it as a souvenir of the home-coming of Princess Rafaela, whom I honor and love with all my heart. The rose was a souvenir of my princess, my lovely princess alone; but I shall now give it up since it has been so falsely interpreted by you. You cannot fight against your nature! Very good. I cannot fight against mine, and a love which foams like champagne and dies away as quickly as this foam will always be a mystery and unsympathetic to me." And with a brief nod the angry little goddess disappeared, and Valleral stood motionless and looked after her. Had he made a false play? Had he really lost her forever? He tosses his head back with his old gay laugh. He is madly in love with the sweet, defiant, sharp-thorned little rose, who shall learn to like champagne foam—*coûte qui coûte!*

Baroness Ohly once more stands beside him.

"Well, can my husband give his blessing?" she asks, with good-natured mockery.

He laughs with her.

"Not to-day and not to-morrow, but somewhat later."



CHAPTER XXI.

The thaw, which had lasted only three days, had melted the snow on the park lake, and when, during the night a sharp frost had occurred, the surface was such a smooth glare of ice that the duchess gave orders to prepare the lake for a court skating party.

The park, usually so quiet, now presented an unusually gay scene. The regimental band played, and carriages rolled hither and thither.

Count Cyril Lankwitz, who had already entered his somewhat premature office of tutor to the little prince, waited with Princess Rafaela's retinue for her highness to appear.

As he had been detained over some work of Princess Hermine's, Cyril had made use of the little side corridor which connected Princess Rafaela's private apartments with the ground-floor by means of a winding staircase.

This corridor, usually so dark, was quite light. The young princess seemed to have left her dressing-room already, for the door stood open, and involuntarily in passing Cyril had glanced in.

He started slightly.

At the foot of the divan, upon which the princess loved to recline, stood an easel, and upon that, the light falling full upon it, stood the picture of Castle Soldau, his father's gift!

It seemed to be guarded with especial care. A charming arrangement of blooming plants surrounded it, and—a sharp pain shot through the count's heart—on the broad rococo frame a photograph was fastened. A man's head, it seemed, and who could it be but his father?

Cyril rushed on as though pursued.

So, then, she does love him, although in her first passionate excitement over "Madam Potiphar" she had denied it to the duke.

Almost at the same time two ladies-in-waiting returned to the dressing-room from the *boudoir*.

"Ha, ha! In her haste she has left the photograph out to-day," said one in a loud voice. "Well, was I not right? It is Count Lankwitz! I told you so."

With feverish haste Cyril rushed on. It seemed to him as though he must put his hands to his ears that he need hear nothing more—he knew enough.

When he entered the hall, the folding doors of the orangery were at that moment thrown open, and Rafaela, followed by a court lady, hurried toward the waiting retinue.

She wore a costume of dark-green velvet and sable, and a toque of the same rested upon her graceful head. A bunch of magnificent roses was fastened to her little muff.

It was the first time that the princess had officially appeared in colors.

She looked very gay and animated, her dark eyes flashed, and her delicately oval face was rosy beneath her fine gauze veil. She turned and smiled at Count Cyril, but a shadow clouded her face almost immediately.

"Do you not feel well, count? You look so—so strange."

The chamberlain bowed.

"I can complain of no physical ailment, your highness," said he, attempting to jest.

"You work too hard. I must command you to join our skating-parties more frequently." The flush on her cheeks deepened. She quickly turned to the door and entered one carriage, while Cyril and Miss von Riegnitz followed in another.

Cyril glanced at the first smaller lake, which was crowded with skaters. The larger one was reserved for the court.

Count Cyprian stood among a group of officers and gazed at the approaching carriages with evident impatience. All the men hurried to intercept the footman and open the carriage door for the princess, but the rest drew back as a matter of course before the captain, allowing him to assist her highness alone. So, then, the conviction of society that every day may bring the announcement of the en-

gagement of this much discussed couple, is deeply rooted. Who are so well suited to each other as Madam Potiphar and Valleral?

"Dear me, count, why do you sigh so dolefully?" said Miss Lola's clear, mocking voice at his side. "Does the sight of so many gay children of the world fill you with horror?"

"The sight of a single one is sufficient," said he, with a touch of his old sharpness. Then he opens the carriage door and springs out.

Rafaela seems to have thanked Count Cyprian very briefly. She already advances toward the group of court ladies.

"Good day, father!"

"Good day, my boy."

The captain slaps his son somewhat absently on the shoulder. The princess's shortness must have vexed him, for there is a strange frown between his brows. Cyril knows that his father's vanity is his vulnerable spot. Has he not said himself: "A lady's graciousness cools me. Coolness attracts me."

He stares moodily along the park road.

"Are you not skating to-day?"

Cyprian shrugs his shoulders.

"I suppose I must. The duchess looks upon it, as well as dancing, as an affair of service."

"Will you accompany me?"

"Go on ahead. I will come after you."

"Farewell!"

"*Au revoir*, boy!"

Yes, he seems out of temper and unusually excited. A tormenting unrest overcomes Cyril, a de-

spairing passion which flashes in his gloomy eyes. He turns and goes. Cyprian still gazes along the road. The carriages are returning.

“Unheard of ! Are they not coming?”

Cyprian goes up to a couple of ladies, and greeting them in his usual affable manner, asks, as though it were an afterthought :

“Where is Baroness Ohly?”

“Ohly !”

The ladies are electrified, and the younger cries :

“Only think what foolishness, Count Lankwitz ! Florence must be ill or insane. Now, in the depth of winter, the whole family depart for Castle Bahrenberg. Is that permissible?”

Cyprian's handsome face is the picture of the utmost amazement, but he quickly recovers himself and says laughingly :

“To Bahrenberg? Are they going to dream away a winter idyl, or is it business connected with an inheritance that makes their presence there unnecessary?”

“Inheritance? No author of ‘Madam Potiphar’ has presented himself yet, and—who knows? Perhaps at a certain time the will becomes invalid. I await a letter of explanation from Florence, for such a French leave is unpardonable.”

Cyprian draws back as some others join the ladies. He stands aside and backs at the ice with his skate. His brow is clouded ; no one has ever seen Valleral so out of sorts as he is to-day.

The news that villa Ohly is suddenly deserted passes from mouth to mouth, and some one tells

Cyril with much positiveness, that, by a clause of the will, the inheritance falls to Florence in case the author of "Madam Potiphar" does not announce himself within a certain time.

He hears it with the utmost indifference. Just then his father comes up to him and whispers excitedly :

"Rafaela avoids me very ostentatiously ; I implore you, my dear boy, arrange that she command me to skate with her. I must speak to her. I *must*, Cyril, do you hear?" and he glides noiselessly away.

It seems to the young tutor that his heart will cease beating. There is no doubt that his father wishes to bring the matter to a decision to-day. Cyril's heart cries out in pain and torment. His father ! Why his own father, whom he cannot bitterly oppose ? And yet in thought he does so ; he feels that suddenly a gulf opens between them, which all the reverence of his childhood, all his obedience, cannot bridge.

They are as unlike as fire and water, yet their love has been mutually deep until to-day.

Princess Rafaela stands beside her brother and lays her hand on his arm to rest a moment. The duke glances tenderly at her rosy face, which has never seemed so fresh and lovely to him as to-day. And as he watches her more closely he sees what a happy change has taken place in her expression. The bold, childish obstinacy has disappeared, and in its place has come a mild gentleness. She looks happy. Is it because she has won the love of her child ?

That also ; but there is something else in the

radiance of her expression. Can that sweet, all-powerful love, which she denied a short time before, have come to her? The duke's eyes follow the captain's handsome figure anxiously as the latter skates rapidly and proudly past.

A feeling of uneasiness overcomes him. Count Cyprian is no suitable husband for Rafaela. Not because he was not born to the purple, but because he lacks all that could make a character such as his sister happy for long. Fortunately the princess has taken but little notice of him to-day, although this may be only a sweet shrinking from displaying to the public, as yet, this, her heart's deepest emotion.

Rafaela's voice rouses him from his thoughts.

"Henry, I would like to ask you something."

He glances down at her in surprise.

"Well, man has leave to ask one question of fate," says he, jokingly,

The young princess glances at the opposite side of the park. There a broad canal connects the lake with the distant river.

"See how fascinating it looks over there in the snowy forest. I should so like to flee from this noisy crowd and explore the canal. It looks so romantic, the ice is like glass, and they say more than three feet thick, so there could be no danger in such an extra turn. Henry, could I skate on the canal without making myself conspicuous?"

"Certainly, my darling. These are no hot springs, nor do robbers lurk in the woods. With a suitable escort the way is open to you. Whom did you think of summoning to your side?"

She gazed attentively at her skate.

"I thought of Count Lankwitz—"

"Cyprian?" says the duke, anxiously.

She shook her head violently.

"Oh, no. Cyril, as Henry's tutor, stands nearer to me."

The duke drew a deep breath.

"Very true. I tell you frankly that Count Cyril is probably the only one of our courtiers with whom you could absent yourself without exciting talk."

"Why?" said she, looking up suddenly.

"Because he is, thank Heaven, the exact opposite of his father. The captain is a thorough gentleman, but there is a certain something about his nature and reputation which scarcely makes him suited to act as chaperon to a lady. Cyril, on the other hand, will never compromise a lady. His reputation is faultless, his manner so strictly reliable, that scandal would never venture to attack him. At his side you are safe. At his father's you are exposed to calumny."

Rafaela raised the roses on her muff to her lips. Her face was crimson.

"Oh, Henry," she cried, excitedly, "how fine it is when a man's reputation and honor are so unimpeachable! Why was not Cyril always my guardian spirit? So much, much trouble would have been spared me."

The duke himself summoned Count Cyril and communicated the princess's wish to him in a low tone.

Cyril bowed in evident surprise. His face wore

a strange look of secret misery. Rafaela hastily whispered something to her lady-in-waiting, and the latter's cavalier, a command which did not seem to delight Miss Lola. It was so gay and amusing here. She only skated for the sake of the men. What did she care for the lonely, tiresome canal? With a pout she held out her hand to her escort and followed the princess.

Rafaela had turned to Cyril.

"Are you willing to inspect the park, count?" she asked, without looking at him.

"Your highness's wish is always a command to me," he replied hastily, and then his hands clasp hers. His face is very pale, the pressure of his fingers convulsive. He holds her close to his side, and they glide away as though in a dream. She has never been so near to him before. He feels how her cool little hands grow warm in his. A crack in the ice, a little unevenness, sends her slender figure even nearer to him. Is it the perfume of the roses that makes his head whirl?

Why, why this torment? Why may he not clasp her once in his arms, although in a short time he must relinquish her to another? Why is the world so narrow and small? Why can he not rush on with her thus forever? His heart burns. All the torment of hopeless passion glows in his dark eyes.

There is a faint cry behind them. Both start and pause. Baroness Lola is on her knees; her escort tries in alarm to raise her.

"For heaven's sake, dearest, have you hurt yourself?" cries the princess.

The court lady rises with many sighs of pain :

“Oh, my foot? Your highness, I fear I have injured it,” says she.

“How unfortunate! And we are so far from the lake. Go and order a sleigh, Mr. von Laden. We will stay with the poor patient.”

“A thousand thanks, your highness!” says Lola, with a mournful smile. “I think I can move, slowly though, very slowly. If your highness would only permit me to return.”

A shadow crosses Rafaela’s face.

“What a pity! Just now, when it is so lovely here.”

“Good gracious! Your highness can go on, of course.”

“Alone?” says the princess, hesitatingly.

An ironical smile crosses the baroness’s suffering countenance.

“Count Lankwitz, the knight without fear and without reproach, bears, as the angel of innocence, a flaming sword beside you, your highness. What could happen?”

The princess compresses her lips.

“You are, right, baroness. Thank fortune. Count Cyril, even alone, is protection enough for me. Mr. von Laden, take the patient back.”

“Pardon, your highness, a thousand pardons.”

Rafaela has turned away. She looks at Cyril, and smilingly holds out her hands again.

“Come, count,” says she, softly, and they glide on over the smooth ice.

“Your highness,” he says, “what a proud, delightful testimony you gave me.”

She turns her head and looks at him with shining eyes.

"It is my conviction," says she, simply.

He tries to speak. The blood rushes to his head and robs him of his breath. Suddenly he raises her hand and presses it to his lips.

All is silence! Around them is the deep, solemn peace of a snowy forest. The glittering branches often bend so low over the ice that the count must raise them over the princess's head. How the branches shine, when an occasional sunbeam pierces the forest, and snowflakes fly through the air when a frightened crow starts up with a hoarse caw.

The world seems so far away, and the two human beings fancy they have wings and can fly on, hand in hand, each with no thoughts save for the other. They are far from the lake; how far they do not know.

Suddenly a faltering, a start. Almost unconsciously Cyril throws his arm around the slender figure to support it, and for a second Rafaela rests on his breast. All is deathly still; only the two hearts beat wildly. Then she draws back with crimson cheeks.

"My skate!" says she, softly.

Already he has knelt before her, and she lays her hand on his shoulder to steady herself.

"The clamp!" he murmurs in alarm. "The clamp is broken."

She kicks away the skate.

"What now!" says she, drawing a deep breath.

"Now the return will be much slower than our coming, your highness. We must walk."

"Please take off my other skate."

He does it, but his fingers are very awkward when he holds her little foot in his hand, and it is a slow process.

"It will be best for you to remove your skates, too, count, or else we will be too unequal walkers."

"Yes, your highness."

They chat as before, but their voices seem breathless, embarrassed.

"Well, then, now to return, proud Cid," laughs she.

She glides a few steps on the smooth ice, then gives a faint cry, and clings, tottering, to his arm.

"It is fearfully slippery; you must hold me up, count."

He draws her hand through his arm, but he has the greatest difficulty in keeping his own footing, and they can only advance very slowly.

"This will not do!" cries Rafaela, anxiously. "See how dark it is growing; we will not get home before nightfall. Can we not walk better on the bank?"

"The snow is very deep, and there is no sign of a path close to the bank. And your highness would not venture to pierce the thicket and go to the road, I suppose?"

"If you are with me I can try," she said, with a laugh. It was meant to sound unconstrained, but her voice trembles.

Again his brow flushes, but he, too, laughs.

"Let me break through, your highness," says he, and hastily turns to the bank.

He breaks the branches apart, and then cries:

"Come close behind me, I will be your shield."

No, it is impossible to get through. They sink up to their knees in the snow, the bushes are closely grown together and frozen. Panting and flushed with the exertion, they take a few steps, then the princess leans exhausted against a tree.

"I cannot go on, count," she whispers with pale cheeks, "and it is growing dark, so very, very quickly."

For a moment Cyril pauses and stares at her. She looks exhausted.

"No, we cannot go on thus. We must return."

He hesitates a moment, then asks:

"May I carry you, your highness?"

She nods and stretches out her arms like a tired, helpless child. He raises her, she trembles, he feels it and compresses his lips as though he feared to betray himself with a word, and hastily he fights his way back to the canal.

"I will put on my skates again and carry you, then we will get home soonest," said he.

She only nods. Her little head sinks on his shoulder, and the snow falling from the trees covers it for a moment as with a bridal veil.

When they reach the canal, twilight is already far advanced. Gray shadows rest on the silent forest, and where the branches hang down over the ice it is dark.

In a few minutes Cyril has on his skates, but

Rafaela has sunk down on a fallen tree, and closed her eyes as though in a dream.

"Are you anxious, your highness?" he asks, gently, bending down close to her.

Then she looks up at him and smiles, such a strange, sweet smile, that the questioner's heart almost ceases to beat.

"No," says she. "I am only tired, and your strong, faithful arms will take pity on my fatigue."

He silently holds out his arms to raise her slight figure once more, and again his face wears the look of inward torture, and Rafaela notices it.

"Why do you suddenly look so gloomy?"

He avoids her eyes.

"You call my arms strong and faithful, princess, and you trust them. What greater happiness could I know! And what greater misery could there be than the fear that you might lose this happy belief in my fidelity!"

"What a strange idea! Such a time will never come."

His brows contracted gloomily, fairly threateningly.

"No, it shall not come, and yet if it does come—my eyes shall not see it."

She leaned her head back so that he must look in her smiling face.

"Your eyes must not gaze at such gloomy, fantastical future scenes, but at the bright, lovely present. There behind the trees the moon is rising, and the quiet world around us is mysteriously beautiful. To be sure, the ghostly charger is lacking, upon which

Salger, the Norse hero, once bore a sleeping princess in his arms, but instead you have steel wings, so that you may bear me home as quickly as he. Courage, my brave knight, let the saga of young Salger prove true."

In truth, he seems to have wings.

Like a dream, the uncanny, dark forest glides past them, the first pale, silvery moonbeams lie on the ice, and from the distant city comes the chime of bells.

Cyril's head is feverish; quickly, ever more quickly he glides on, and yet he knows that each step brings him nearer his goal; that each step robs him of his happiness, and tears his love, who now rests on his breast, pitilessly from his arms.

How long will it be before the bells are hushed, and the happiest hour of his life is over! But as yet she is his. No, the time shall never come when Rafaela will doubt him. Never! Why should he worry? The unhappy secret of "Madam Potiphar" lies safely buried in a secret drawer of his writing-desk; to-day the leaves of the manuscript shall fall in ashes, and then the secret will be safe forever.

Hark! There are voices, and lights flash along the canal. They are looking for them. Involuntarily Cyril starts. Now it is over.

"Lackeys with torches," he murmurs, and he leans his head back and gazes into her eyes as though he was taking leave of her forever. Then he lets the princess slide gently down to the ground. She clasps both his hand once more.

"I thank you. I thank you with all my heart," says she, softly.

He kisses her hand, then offers his arm respectfully. Slowly, step by step, they advance to meet those looking for them.

Young Salger kissed his princess and took her as his own for a reward of his fidelity ; but Count Cyril's steel wings will never carry him over the abyss which separates him from his princess.

Duke Henry's voice rang out from the distance, and it seemed to Cyril that a faint sigh from Rafaela's lips answered it.





CHAPTER XXII.

A sensational bit of news greeted the princess and her escort. As explanation why they had not sooner become alarmed at the princess's long absence, the duke related the following :

When her lady-in-waiting returned to the lake with a sprained ankle she had seated herself in a sleigh, and in order to forget her accident had carried on an animated conversation with different gentlemen. This being watched disapprovingly by the duke, his rather sharp remarks made Lola think it advisable to return to Sophienhof as an invalid. Her unexpectedly early return had proved a blessing.

Availing themselves of the absence of the princess, her court and most of the servants, several bold fellows had broken into the castle from the lonely park side.

Their aim had been the princess's jewel safe in her dressing-room, but "*en passant*," they had broken open and apparently robbed Count Lankwitz's writing-desk, while valuables had been taken from other rooms.

Rafaela's jewel safe showed signs of rough work, but its excellent construction had resisted the

thieves' efforts. Great excitement had prevailed at the announcement of this news. All had flocked to Sophienhof, even the duke himself, that he might be present at the police investigation. Thus the princess's unusually long absence had not been noticed until the excitement had somewhat abated, and the late dinner hour arrived.

Cyril's face had turned deathly pale at his sovereign's words.

"My writing-desk broken open and robbed?" he stammered, scarcely able to speak.

"Unfortunately, my dear count. I hope you had no very large sum of money and valuables in it?"

The count stared absently at the torches, then asked suddenly:

"May I humbly beg you to excuse me, your highness?"

"Certainly, certainly, hurry, my dear count. Perhaps you will be fortunate enough to find some secret compartment undisturbed."

The duke held out his hand graciously, and Rafaela, too, offered hers, with a few gentle words of sympathy, but the news seemed to have quite overcome the count. He fairly started back from the princess as though in despair. A short, hurried bow, and he rushed away as though pursued by demons.

The two court carriages stood ready at the lake side. Cyril sprang into one breathlessly.

"Quick, drive quickly!" he gasped.

A police officer met him on the steps of Sophienhof, and wished to communicate something to him,

but without listening to him, with staring gaze, and distorted countenance, Cyril pushed him aside, and rushed down the corridor.

His room was lighted. The heavy, old, carved secretary was pushed out from the wall. The lock was picked, the drawers pulled out and their contents overhauled, while the boards were removed from the back, leaving the desk a mere skeleton.

A hollow cry of dismay! Cyril totters nearer, and runs his hand under the lid, then a wild laugh of despair comes from his lips, and he falls heavily to the ground.

The manuscript of "Madam Potiphar" has been stolen.

Hasty steps approach, the policeman on guard rushes in in alarm, and raises the unconscious man in his strong arms. He calls for the valet, tries to ring the bell, when Cyril opens his eyes again.

He glances in confused question at the strange face, then his consciousness quickly returns.

"Hush, hush!" he groans. "For God's sake, be silent."

He rises suddenly, and throws himself into an armchair, pressing his ice-cold hands to his temples.

"Good heavens! You have certainly met with heavy losses, count!" says the official, compassionately. "But do not excite yourself prematurely. Our people are already on the track of the thieves."

The prince's tutor stares at him hopelessly.

"Yes, a heavy loss," he murmurs dully. "Now all is over."

"The count will certainly receive the things again."

Cyril only shakes his head in silence. For a second there is no sound. Only the papers scattered on the carpet rustle softly as the official withdraws a few steps.

Suddenly the young count raises his head, and holds out his hand.

"I thank you for your friendly assistance. The excitement of the moment made me weak. Now I am quite myself again, and should like to be alone."

The man withdraws, closing the door behind him.

The lamp burns dimly. All is still, deathly still, save for the ticking of a clock, like the weary heart-beats of a dying man.

Cyril sits motionless.

Yes, now all is over. To-day he has been in Paradise. And since there can be no happiness on earth for the man who loves Princess Rafaela, and who wrote "*Madam Potiphar*," it would be well for the poor tormented mortal to leave this earth. What has he to live for? To suffer torments of dread that his unhappy secret will be discovered? Never to be free from this terrible uncertainty, and finally to stand in Rafaela's sight as the man who has caused her the greatest pain she has ever known.

No, he cannot bear her anger, scorn and disfavor after to-day. Better die!

"Die—die!" ticks the clock.

His head is confused and hot. A high, gray wall seems to rise before him.

With trembling hand he fetches paper and ink.

Sheets and envelopes lie scattered around. He writes to Princess Rafaela a last brief note of parting, a wild cry of despairing love, which has driven itself to its own death. He sealed the envelope and laid it on the table. Then he took his pistol-case from the mantel. The little weapon and expensive present from the duke is loaded. Cyril takes it in his trembling hand. His fingers are colder than the steel.

With a convulsive sigh he raises the deadly weapon.

At that moment a hand seizes his and draws it forcibly down.

"Coward!" thunders a voice. "Have you forgotten your God, your conscience and your honor?"

Cyril starts. His head sinks heavily on his breast. The voice is his father's. The captain draws the pistol from his hand and throws it back in its case. Then he lays his hand heavily on his son's shoulder.

"Cyril!"

Then the young man raises his ghastly face and stares at him with glassy eyes.

"What right have you to disgrace the honorable name of your ancestors? Have you committed a dishonorable deed, the disgrace of which can be wiped out only by blood?"

"Dishonorable? Dishonorable?" murmurs Cyril, as though in a dream. "No, it was not dishonorable."

"So much the worse, if a man will become a sinner against himself and his family for the sake of a

trifle. Justify yourself! What has forced a pistol into your hand?"

Cyril buries his face in his hand with a groan.

"You gave me life, father, but you have no right to force it upon me when it has become unbearable."

Cyprian pushes a chair close to his son's side.

"That is a matter for discussion." He seizes one of the ice-cold hands and clasps it tightly in his. "You are ill, boy," he says softly and gently. "Tell me what ails you that I may cure you."

Cyril's head sinks down on his father's shoulder.

"You will learn, father, sooner than you will care to know," he murmurs.

The captain glances around the room.

"You have been robbed?"

A nod.

"Your fortune is safely deposited. It can only be some private document?"

Cyril shudders, and again nods in silence.

"Confide in me, Cyril."

Then he starts up, his eyes rolling madly.

"I am the author of 'Madam Potiphar!'" he cries hoarsely. "And the manuscript has been stolen from me."

The captain also starts.

"You? You the author of 'Madam Potiphar'?" he repeats incredulously.

Cyril laughs cuttingly.

"This possibility has never occurred to you, has it?" he cries bitterly.

"Why not! You are clever and intellectual, and never could endure Rafaela—"

“ ‘Never could endure her!’ Oh, my God!”

The captain suddenly gazes piercingly at his son’s distorted countenance. A sudden comprehension flashes across him.

“At least not *formerly*—” he continues, with emphasis, “but now—”

“Do not speak it!”

“But now you love her!”

Again a half-delirious laugh.

“Yes, I love her, I love her! And in a few hours perhaps she will know that I once condemned her before all the world, and she will repulse me with horror. Do you now understand that I can and must live no longer?”

Cyprian calmly leaned back in his chair.

“No, not at all!” said he, shaking his head in his old, careless way. “Rafaela is a woman, and no woman is unpropitiable, especially when she herself loves.”

Cyril started.

“You do not believe that she will pardon the son for the father’s sake?” he murmurs bitterly.

“For my sake?” Valleral laughs. “Oh, dear innocent! What have I to do with the princess?”

“You love each other, and you will marry her.”

“We do not think of it. The father is tolerated for the son’s sake. But as one never knows with Rafaela, whether her apparent feelings come from her heart, I will not encourage your all too bold hopes; for the present, more important matters must be attended to. Cyril, you wrote ‘Madam Potiphar!’ This is a capital discovery. The devil,

yes!" and the captain sprang up excitedly, and paced the room several times. Suddenly he paused beside Cyril. "Do you really believe that the manuscript will be recovered from the thieves?"

"Yes. I have always been marked for misfortune."

"Is your full name given on it as the author?"

Cyril passed his hand over his brow, as though obliged to collect his thoughts by force. Then he shook his head.

"No, only my initials, C. L.— But the writing would betray me."

The captain suddenly rubbed his hands as though greatly pleased, and laid his arm around his son's shoulders with sparkling eyes.

"Boy, I have a brilliant idea!" he cried.

Cyril stared at him dully.

"We both are as unlike as fire and water," laughed Cyprian, "except our handwritings, which are as like as two peas. The initials of both of us are 'C. L.,' ergo, if it suits you, my boy, calmly push the child of your intellect, 'Madam Potiphar,' into my nest, and it will give me great pleasure to proclaim myself the author."

"Father!" came from the young man's lips. His dull eyes brightened, a hot flush rose to his pale face, as he caught at this hope as a drowning man seizes a plank. "Father—you would—would do that?"

"Will I do it? Ha, ha! To-day the manuscript in my pocket, to-morrow Aunt Claudine's millions mine! I will be more practical than you, you fan-

tastic mortal! Good heavens! The boy lets a million-dollar inheritance lie in his writing-desk and did not excavate the treasure! Besides, it will be a colossal joke for me to have written such a clever book. I the author of 'Madam Potiphar!' I actually begin to respect myself," and Valleral was now quite his old self, sprang up, went to the mirror, and proudly twisted his mustache.

Cyril had clasped his hands. His frame shook with excitement.

"It would save me from her scorn, her reproaches. But you, father, do you not fear the displeasure of the duke and the princess?"

"Not in the least. I will get out of the affair finely. I care only for the favor of my little Mignon. Heavens, what eyes, when I move into Castle Bahrenberg as co-owner!" and Valleral flung himself into his chair with the gayest of laughs, and threw his arm around his son. "You are a fine fellow, my boy. And you, foolish fellow, would destroy yourself because you have written one of the best books ever printed."

The young man leaned heavily against his father. His head and hands, so icy cold a moment before, now glowed with fever, and his temples throbbed.

"And the duke—and Rafaela will not lay up against me the fact that my father wrote 'Madam Potiphar'?" he murmured, with a deep sigh.

"Not a bit of it, my boy. Let me see to that!"

A deep breath of relief, then he whispers:

"Now I must pick her up in my arms—it grows more and more dark—the moon is rising— There,

there—very quickly— Good heavens ! the abyss !— We will fall—do not leave me, Rafaela—I shall perish without you— Hark, how they call—all the lights dance around me—and the stars fall and bury me beneath their splendor—”

Alarmed, Cyprian bent forward and stared in his son's face. He is delirious.

Hastily his father lays him back against the soft cushions and rushes to the bell.

“Fetch a doctor at once !” he says to the servant.

A detective appears on the threshold. His face beams with joy.

“We have them, count,” he says ; “and here the chief of police sends the chamberlain's box. It is already opened. The thieves probably suspected valuable papers, but they are apparently only legal documents.”

Cyprian seized the metal box hastily.

“Excellent ! A thousand thanks, my good fellow. Have the police been informed of the contents ?”

“As far as I know the things have been looked over, count.”

“So ! A thousand thanks meanwhile. As soon as possible I will come and arrange everything personally.”

The door closes softly. Cyprian goes to the light and casts a hasty glance in the box. It contains the manuscript of “Madam Potiphar.”

Count Cyril Lankwitz lies ill with a nervous fever, and, at his father's wish, is removed to a private hospital. The captain remains with the patient until his life is no longer in danger.

Daily, Princess Rafaela stops with her little son at the entrance, to inquire for the count in person. He recovers slowly. The physicians think possibly the seeds of the disease have been sown by years of continual nervous excitement, which needed but some slight cause to burst forth.

The curtains are drawn tightly, and Cyril lies in a death-like slumber, little dreaming that at that moment his father's carriage rolls up to the ducal palace, and that the hour is at hand when "Madam Potiphar" is to be called from oblivion for the last time.





CHAPTER XXIII.

Count Cyprian Lankwitz stood before his sovereign.

His handsome face wore a look of unmistakable amusement as he bowed deeply, and said :

“Your highness is rightly informed. The manuscript of ‘Madam Potiphar’ was discovered by the police lieutenant, and the gentleman only did his duty in announcing this surprising find, just as the police were commissioned to discover the author.”

The duke gazed at the speaker in amazement.

“You—you knew where the manuscript was found, my dear count?”

A faultless bow.

“Yes, your highness. In my son’s writing-desk.”

“Incredible! Count Cyril can not possibly be the author. At most, possibly his confidant.”

“Will your highness permit me to speak quite freely? I think it beneath my dignity to give my sovereign false impressions, although I pledged myself to them to save my son’s life.”

The duke seated himself, with a wave of his hand toward the chair at his side.

"I shall know how to appreciate this frankness, my dear count," said he, without a trace of angry excitement.

"There was a time, your highness will remember, when Cyril was the target for all disfavor and many unjust caprices on the part of her highness, the princess. Upon an indifferent heart, these continual vexations would make a deep and lasting impression; how much more upon Cyril's, for he—pardon my frankness, your highness—had from childhood felt a deep, passionate love for the charming little princess. Cyril is one of those unhappy natures who are too reserved to let the world see their inward conflicts. But where unbridled passions must rage themselves out in solitude, they overshoot moderation, and make the wildest mistakes. The poor boy hated his own father, as a favored rival, and 'Madam Potiphar' is the wild outburst of mingled love, hatred and wild jealousy, which for years had tortured the young heart. I am convinced that Cyril absolutely could not estimate the effect of his act. In blind passion, he intended merely to open, with 'Madam Potiphar,' a gulf between the princess and me, and I think I may assure you, on my word of honor, that Cyril has suffered most from the evil this unhappy book has caused."

"He has proved this by his faithful, self-sacrificing efforts to atone for his fault to Rafaela." The duke rose, and his grave face wore a look of kind

sympathy. "So it was Cyril! Cyril!" he murmured. "Poor young man! In his despair he hurt himself. 'Evil the book has caused,' my dear count?" The duke paused before Cyprian and looked him in the eyes. "One confidence deserves another. The evil is small in comparison with the blessing it has wrought. The book accomplished that for which we had all vainly striven, and taught the young, inexperienced princess the lesson that it is not sufficient to have a clear conscience, but that it is necessary to avoid everything that may give the world opportunity to judge one falsely. Rafaela cast our admonitions to the wind, and, in childish defiance, quarreled with us, when I tried to bring her to reason. So she could not wonder if public opinion became her preceptor. A princess upon whom thousands of eyes are fixed must be doubly cautious. Men judge only from outward appearances. That Rafaela has never gone too far, that the slightest shadow never fell upon her honor and dignity, you yourself know best, count. Still, in 'Madam Potiphar' was to be read only what passed from mouth to mouth. Appearances were against her, and she had to feel, since she would not hear. And what an extraordinary effect the book has had upon her, we remark each day with delight. It brought about a crisis in Rafaela's character. She has become a lovely, prudent, thoughtful woman. The remedy was severe but the only one which could avail. Although your son may have exaggerated, and seen things too blackly, my dear count, you have given me, as an excuse for him, a glimpse of

his mental condition, which could but excite pity in any tolerant man. And now we will bury the whole matter. Cyril is very ill; the consciousness that he is forgiven shall make him recover. As to the princess, I wish that the author's name should for the present remain unknown to her. Cyril has atoned. He has a most beneficial influence upon the young prince and his mother, which I should not like to disturb. Let the past be forgotten."

The duke held out his hand heartily, and deeply moved, Cyprian bent and kissed it. Then he looked his sovereign frankly in the face.

"For your highness's great kindness in wishing to spare my son in the princess's sight, I cannot thank your highness sufficiently, for the princess's anger and scorn would drive Cyril to his death. But it would be impossible to keep the secret of 'Madam Potiphar,' for unfortunately premature zeal has already circulated reports in the newspapers, and besides, I believe that some good can be derived from this surprising discovery—"

The duke suddenly laughed aloud.

"Ah, the Bahrenberg inheritance!"

"That is not to be undervalued either, your highness, especially for a poor devil like me, whose funds are permanently low!"

"For you? What have you to do with it?"

"Will your highness have the kindness to hear me once more? On the evening of the burglary I sought Cyril, and found him in a state of absolute despair. In fear and anxiety, and to keep the irresponsible fellow from killing himself, as he was

about to do, I promised him, in case of discovery, to proclaim *myself* the author of the book. Our similar handwriting and initials would insure success."

Again the duke laughed. This time with good-natured mockery.

"You the author of 'Madam Potiphar'? Who would believe that, my dear captain?"

Cyprian laughed too.

"There are misjudged geniuses, your highness, and I have always hidden my light under a bushel," said he, with self-irony.

"But is it not absolutely incredible that the favorite of a 'Madam Potiphar' could write such a book about himself and the lady of his heart?"

"Pardon. I think this very fact gives me an opportunity to make good my son's wronging of the heroine of this book."

"I do not understand you."

"A man who is secretly an author may be also secretly an intriguer. What could better establish the purity of a woman than the fact that he whom, with childish thoughtlessness, she singled out for distinction, writes a book that he may free her, through its compromising contents, to give him her hand? This new light upon the subject will make a sensation, and as I know that 'Madam Potiphar' deserves to be completely justified in the eyes of the world, I think it a chivalrous duty to receive in my own breast all the arrows which were formerly directed at her. If her highness, the princess, has suffered on my account, it is but right that I should suffer for her glorification."

“That is very noble, my dear count, and it would sincerely please me if society should now weave a martyr’s wreath for Rafaela. She deserves it. And your reward? Well, Baroness Bahrenberg’s estate will perhaps recompense you for your sacrifice. I should prefer that the whole affair be suppressed, or do you really think that impossible?”

“Really, your highness, I do. The manuscript of ‘Madam Potiphar’ was not returned to me entire. The most important pages are missing, and are probably the booty of some dishonorable speculator. The thieves scattered some of the pages in the park, thinking them valueless papers. The returning people may have found them, and recognized their value. The words ‘Madam Potiphar’ stood out all too plainly. Already anonymous, blackmailing letters have been sent to mine and my son’s address.”

“Ah—incredible!”

“As these have remained ineffectual, revenge will surely flee to foreign newspapers, to publish the discovery of the secret, for the knowledge of our handwriting proves that the parts of the manuscript are in the hands of some refined person familiar with it.”

“Your official acknowledgment of the authorship would then best stop all further proceedings, and as I see myself, your generosity would settle the affair best in all particulars.”

Thus over night Valleral became the author of “Madam Potiphar,” and as soon as Cyril’s health permitted, he set out at once for the little provincial

town near the Bahrenberg estate to take possession of the old lady's fortune.

It was as he had thought. Again the civilized world was wildly excited. Many declared they had long suspected Cyprian's intrigue, others were amazed ; the former horrified, the latter amused at that madcap Valleral's "clever trick." But all agreed that the poor princess had shared the lot of many another woman, who, in her carelessness, does not realize that the world loves to blacken and vilify prominent characters.

Rafaela's life and manner of late had proved sufficiently how falsely she had been judged, and the whole affair gave wide opportunity to catch a glimpse of the heart of a poor child of royalty, who has been a martyr to her people. Many who had criticised the young princess most sharply, now bowed their heads in shame ; and many malicious tongues now silently found excuses for a wife who was given to an unloved husband in earliest youth, was kept away from her child, by the tyranny of her advisers, and in eighteen-year-old vivacity, sought to forget her empty life in pleasures. People could not weary of giving the princess new proofs of their love and admiration, and never had she been more truly the darling of the whole land.

As Valleral had always been fortunate, so was he now. No cavalier had ever been so popular and such a favorite as Count Lankwitz, and now the Bahrenberg inheritance made him doubly attractive. What foolishness, then, to drive such a good *parti* from the capital. Had not the captain been

most graciously pardoned by the duke? Did not Princess Rafaela continue to drive to the hospital and inquire with sincere interest as to the young count's health? If the royal family set such an example of mildness and forgiveness, was society justified in cutting a man with whom it was not angry? Therefore, to let the whole affair be suppressed as quickly as possible, and act, upon the captain's return, as though nothing had happened, would be wisest. Besides, several other sensational occurrences had set all tongues wagging just then, and gradually crowded this other theme into the background.

* * * * *

In a most satisfied frame of mind Count Cyprian arrived in the little town which, as yet, had no suspicion that the Baroness Bahrenberg's long-awaited heir at last knocked at its gates.

The lawyers passed a highly interesting morning. And when the captain had established his identity beyond all doubt, partly by the manuscript, partly by letters from the publisher, the matter was very easily and simply arranged, and no objection was made to the count's occupying the half of Castle Bahrenberg now belonging to him, until all formalities were complied with, and he was thoroughly established in his rights as heir.

It was a rainy spring afternoon when Count Cyprian, his valet Moulin and a lawyer drove out, in the only landau in the town, to Castle Bahrenberg.

The count wished to arrive as unnoticed as possible. He stopped the carriage at the open park gate,

ordered Moulin to go on to the castle with the luggage, and let the lawyer unseal the door, while he walked through the park.

Cyprian hurried on over the soft, mossy path. Before him rose the castle turrets and gables behind the leafless trees, and at one side sparkled a little lake—surely the one at which, years before, his friend Florence's fate had been decided.

Hark! Were those voices or birds? No, some one laughs quite near him. That is Mignon's laugh. And now a man's voice!

Thick evergreens screen the path. Valleral draws nearer, unheard and unseen. An ideal little resting-place beside the lake, surrounded by old willows. The count cautiously pushes the branches aside. Only a few steps from him stands Mignon. She has a little basket on her arm, and is cutting pussy willows, while a young man gallantly bends the branches down. Who is he? The conversation seems very important, for Mignon's face is crimson, and she vainly tries to draw her hand from the speaker's, who clasps it tightly together with the twigs.

"Mignon!" he cries, with an unmistakably foreign accent. "I have seen your picture, and it has brought me here across the sea, from the distant north. What are my studies in Upsala to me? I will study you and your heart, you beautiful, fascinating woman!"

He speaks like an actor, with great pathos and many gestures.

"But my dear cousin, what nonsense!" laughs the young girl, half confused, half flattered. "How can

you speak so to a mere girl? I assure you, in the capital they do not consider me anything remarkable."

He strikes his chest dramatically.

"Because your German fatherland is pedantic. Because the women are jealous and the men blind. What do you lack to be fitted for the most prominent position? You are grown; you are intellectual; you are beautiful. Who counts your years and wishes to force you back to the nursery is a fool!"

Mignon bites her rosy lips; her eyes flash.

"Oh, if you knew, Sven, how I have been insulted!" she says, with set teeth.

"Insulted! You?" The young man tosses back his yellow mane wildly. "I will avenge you. I will fight for you. No queen has ever had a more faithful knight. I will break your chains, and will show your enemy that there is still one man who places you above all other women," and he noisily struck his stiffly starched shirt front. "But give me the right, Mignon. Betroth yourself to me."

She drew back in alarm.

"Oh, you are jesting!" she stammered.

"Jesting!" he said reproachfully. "Unhappy girl, how can you thus trample my holiest feelings in the dust! When a man gives a woman his heart and love, in such a sacred hour, all jest is far from him."

"Yes, yes. So it should be," said Mignon, frowning.

"I mean truly. I am in earnest with my suit, for

it makes you my whole life. No other woman exists for me but you, my goddess. And whoever, in such a moment, thinks and acts otherwise does not love you!"

A deep sigh. The young girl clasps her hands convulsively. "No. He does not love me," she murmurs.

"This is very pretty," thinks Cyprian. "The devil! If the fellow tries to kiss her I will attack him with my umbrella."

But the young lover is at present too rhetorical for kisses. He draws a little ring from his pocket and puts it on his cousin's finger.

"I make you my betrothed," says he, glancing at the sky, "for higher powers have destined us for each other. Here in the castle dwells a beneficent, protecting spirit, who shall guard this ring."

"And if he does not guard it, but loses it from my finger?" says Mignon, irresolutely.

"Then it is a decree of fate to which I bow," says Sven, condescendingly. "As long as no supernatural power separates us, I fear no earthly one. And now come to my arms."

She draws away from him, and shakes her head energetically.

"My parents and the protecting spirit have not yet given their consent," says she, with flaming cheeks. "And although I believe that you love me as sacredly and truly as I desire, yet, Sven, I claim a short time to determine my own feelings."

"You wear my ring on your finger, beloved," cries he, passionately. "Swear to me that you will

not remove it! Higher powers have united our hearts and hands; only higher powers may release them."

She has quickly turned away; he follows her, declaiming until his voice dies away in the distance.

"This is a pleasant discovery!" thinks Valleral, meditatively smoothing his blonde mustache. "I begin to fear this boy, Sven. The rascal has taken just the tone Mignon requires, as suitable to love-making. And the cousin is handsome, although his sanctimonious air makes me detest him. It is all put on. But wait, I am on the spot now, and I, too, will call upon the beneficent spirits of Bahrenberg to show more favor to an honest fellow than to you, you sneak!"

The Ohly entrance of the castle lay to the north, that of the new heir to the south; and there was not a soul in sight, except the valet, as the count approached.

"A dreadful castle, count," said he, anxiously. "We are absolutely alone."

"For to-day; to-morrow it shall be different. Come, you French rabbit-heart, we will inspect our enchanted castle!"

It is a strange feeling, to enter perfectly unfamiliar rooms with the consciousness that they belong to us. Every nook and corner is interesting.

Slowly, almost reverently, Cyprian wandered from room to room, in which, a comparatively short time before, his unknown patroness had lived and breathed. All was just as Claudine had left it, and

it seemed as though a mysterious whispering broke the deep stillness, as though invisible powers rejoiced that Cyprian, the only one Claudine had ever loved, should enter her home as heir.

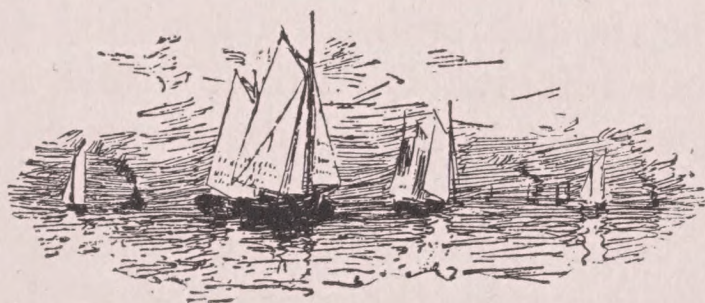
How much that is interesting these cupboards and drawers contain! Valleral almost regrets that there is no woman here to revel in the treasures of household linen. In the writing-desk, the sealing wax and seal used by the dead woman for her last will still lies. Undestroyed old letters, receipts and newspaper cuttings are neatly arranged in the compartments, and a never-finished letter to the head of some charitable institution is in the portfolio.

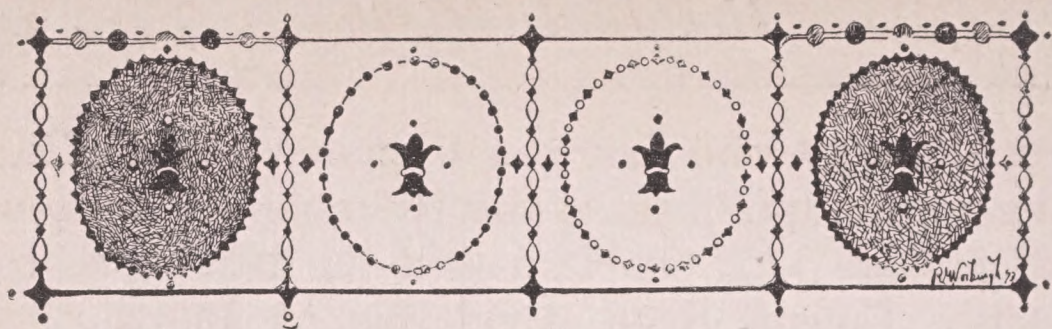
And here the bedroom, all untouched, just as the dead woman left it. On a little table stands the half-full medicine bottle, a silver spoon in a glass beside it. A prayer-book lay on the floor, and here, where the coffin had stood, are faded flowers and leaves, with wax from the candles which had lighted up the peaceful face of the poor sufferer.

Deep sadness overcomes Cyprian. He seats himself in an armchair, and tries to recall the dead woman, as he had known her. He has but a vague memory of her. He sees only the large, awkward, stooping, girlish figure, poor Claudine Bahrenburg, whom he had once at dancing school thought so very homely. Here, surrounded by her things, the homely face seems encircled by a halo, beautified and idealized, and the good-hearted Cyprian thinks: "No one understood you, poor Claudine; no one found the way to you, to bring life, happiness and peace to you in your solitude. I come too late. I

almost envy Cyril, that you became so fond of him through his book."

Poor Claudine ! Those days in the dancing-school, you never suspected that some day a man, who then had no eyes or ears for you, long years afterward, would sit in your death-chamber and mourn you sincerely !





CHAPTER XXIV.

Never had Cyprian seen more astonished faces than those of the Ohly family, when he appeared before them on the veranda.

Florence cried out as though she had seen a ghost, and Mignon turned pale ; but in this moment, Valleral read the whole truth in her eyes, and this gave him back all his gay confidence.

The news that he had appeared before the court as the author of "Madam Potiphar," and had been acknowledged as Claudine's heir, occasioned a perfect torrent of words from Florence. Her fresh, round face showed only too well what a pleasant triumph Cyprian's appearance was, and probably never was a man received so graciously by a lady whom he has deprived of half her fortune, as was the captain by Baroness Ohly, who hospitably offered to entertain him until his part of the castle should be made comfortable.

Florence welcomed him indeed, for the solitude of a country life had become unbearable, and Mignon, too, had fancied it more amusing than it proved. So, although she tried to be very cold at

first, she became more and more animated the longer the captain sat at the tea-table, and laughed and jested.

Only Cousin Sven, a relative of Baron Ohly, grew more and more monosyllabic and out of temper and saw, with increasing displeasure, that even his relative and confederate fell more and more under Cyprian's charm.

Finally he complained that the "all too great levity" had made his head ache, and begged leave to retire. He held Mignon's hand with a long pressure, rolled his eyes tragically and kissed the little ring on her finger.

"May the protecting spirit of the house be with us!" said he, pathetically, bowed stiffly and left the room.

"The young man is probably a divinity student!" said Cyprian, pleasantly.

Florence laughed aloud, while Mignon flushed vexedly.

"Divinity student! You are right, my dear count. Now I know of what his rhetorical tone often reminds me, although many of our charming young theologians would be very vexed at this comparison."

"I do not know why, mamma," said Mignon, indignantly, "if a man is grave and too noble and sensible to be perpetually joking, he should serve as a fitting subject for mockery."

"So, in your opinion, jolly people are not noble and sensible, Miss Mignon?" said Cyprian.

"At least one does not believe them capable of true feeling."

“That is a very hard judgment. I hope the time will come when you will change your opinion, for I am one of the jolliest of men, and sincerely wish that you should judge me rightly.”

“Well, my dear count, if you often surprise us as you have to-day, you will make that a difficult task. Lankwitz, the author of ‘*Madam Potiphar!*’” and Florence clasped her fat little hands. “Who would have thought it!”

Cyprian smiled.

“Yes, sooner or later the light burns a hole through the bushel.”

“And you concealed your misanthropy so successfully. No, never would I have thought you such a bitter pessimist. Such a moralist—”

“You see, a man’s jollity may deceive, and may conceal the gravest, most pious nature.”

Mignon listened attentively.

“Why do you mingle with the gay world if you despise it so?” she asked scornfully.

“Because one must try and test before one judges.”

“But I think it cowardly to do so anonymously,” said the girl, defiantly. “It was not chivalrous.”

“But effective. You see, no one believed me the author of the book. People think me incapable of grave, deep feelings, because I am merry, and do not wear my most sacred emotions on my sleeve. I cannot find words like your cousin’s, but I should not be in the least surprised if Mr. Sven von Gullenstrom proved to be the author of the most flippant French novel. Appearances are deceitful, Miss Mignon.”

“Outrageous! He does not think of such a thing,” said Mignon, indignantly, although she suddenly looked very thoughtful.

“Sven write books! Heaven forbid that I should have to read them!” cried the baroness. “I think him capable of much, but not that!”

“And why not?” said her daughter, piqued.

“Because it must be fearfully hard, eh, my dear count?”

Cyprian nodded absently, his eyes fixed on the ring on Mignon’s finger.

“H-m, I should think it must be very hard.”

“You should *think*? You must know.”

“Oh, yes, quite right. I mean as a rule. To sit still and scratch a pen over the paper until the book is written—dreadful!”

“You will write no more?”

“I? Heaven forbid! I swear to you, baroness, not another line!”

“Strange! With your great gifts! Then it would have been better had Claudine made another will.”

“Better for you or for me?” said he, teasingly.

“For us both,” was the frank and laconic answer.

Mignon remained silent, and Cyprian soon took leave.

It was very amusing to have Count Cyprian in Bahrenberg, however obstinately Mignon held aloof. Her mother was all the more gracious, and it became very tiresome to the young girl to sit behind the window, listening to Sven’s reproachful, jealous heroics, while Florence promenaded on the terrace

with the captain, and her laughter showed how well she was entertained.

Cyprian made no efforts to win her over. Mignon thought she had probably offended him too deeply, but just because she loved him so dearly, she had not wished to be treated like a baby by him, and her pride had rebelled at the thought of being merely a plaything.

Why was he so indifferent? If she could but arouse his jealousy by coquetting with Sven, but, strangely enough, since Cyprian's arrival, the northerner seems very tiresome; and, most of all, he makes not the slightest impression upon her mother and the count, for they do not hesitate to ridicule him.

The ring weighs on her finger, and yet, with girlish sentimentality, she feels obliged to wear it, until higher powers break the chains imposed upon her by Sven's declaration of love.

So some days pass, and the more unhappy Mignon feels, the merrier becomes Cyprian.

One night he has the strangest dream, so strange that, in recalling it, the next morning, he forgets to ring for Moulin.

He dreamed that he stood downstairs in his dining-room, staring at a magnificently carved cupboard, which was built into the wall near the sideboard.

He saw the door of this cupboard open, and a small white hand beckon to him from it. When, in his delight at actually seeing a ghost, he hurried nearer and opened this cupboard, he saw the boards

at the back part, and a wonderful treasure of silver and gold lay before his eyes. When, in surprise, he reached out for it he awoke.

What could this dream mean? Had Claudine possibly hidden treasure in this cupboard, and had no time to write down this secret? Was there some secret drawer or compartment in this cupboard, containing some important, valuable things?

In any case, the count will investigate. The box of tools which Moulin had borrowed of an Ohly servant to repair a window still stands in the corridor. He therefore hurries into his clothes that he may set about this investigation.

Cyprian and his valet were invited to take all meals in the northern half of the castle, but the valet always, as was his custom, prepared the count's morning cup of tea; and this stood in readiness when the count entered the dining-room. His first glance was for the cupboard. There was nothing remarkable in its appearance; nor did Cyprian, strain his eyes as he might, perceive any white, beckoning hand. While he drank his tea he studied this cupboard, or rather cupboards, for there were two of them—one on each side of the large side-board, the doors handsomely carved.

The one at the right is doubtless the one. The count can scarcely wait to send Moulin away on some reasonable pretext. Finally he goes. It is raining, and the large room is quite dark, hence an excellent ghostly setting, and the wind, too, howls down the chimney.

Cyprian opens the cupboard, and the door turns heavily on its hinges.

Empty! Absolutely empty! Even the shelves are removed and stand against one side. A few old newspapers lie on the floor. The captain knocks on the wall at the back. Aha, hollow! Here and here also the whole space back of the cupboard seems to be a niche. The deuce! The affair grows interesting. If only the cupboard were not so deep. The treasure-seeker has to kneel in to feel the wall at the back.

It is made of oak planks, quite loosely put together. It will be sufficient for the present to remove one. It is not much trouble. The whole business, probably, works by some mechanism, but as Cyprian is not acquainted with it, he simply takes a hammer and draws out the two large nails. Bravo! The plank falls forward and gives one quite a place to look through. Cyprian strikes a match, but in his amazement at the sight which meets his eyes, he burns his fingers. The match has revealed something most unexpected. A quantity of the handsomest silverware! Is he still dreaming? Can it really be possible? He hesitates a moment, then puts his hand through the opening.

His fingers do indeed touch silverware. Here a pitcher, a goblet, another pitcher—a bowl—

But hark, a sound! A rattling and creaking! Then the captain's blood turns cold; a cool, little hand touches his. He reaches out quickly, and holds the soft, little spirit hand of his dream fast.

But a piercing scream rings out from the depth

of the wall, so uncanny and horrible that Cyprian involuntarily releases the twitching, struggling hand. That is too much. He starts back, and hastily restores the board to its place. Then he leaves the cupboard and gazes confusedly around him. For the first time in his life, his heart is in his throat.

It is horrible to reach into a niche in the wall and clap a hand and then the scream!

But, good heavens, what is this? What has he in his hand? A ring? Has he taken a ring from the spirit's hand? The marvels increase.

He goes to the window and stares down at the ring, then rubs his forehead and pinches his ears to convince himself that he is awake, for he *must* be dreaming. It is Mignon's ring, the ring with the blue stone that her cousin Sven had placed on her hand.

What does this mean? How can so many impossibilities be accounted for?

Hark! What murmuring cries and calls! It all comes faintly from the wall.

Cyprian returns to the cupboard and listens. Suddenly his face grows crimson, he rushes into another room, and throwing himself on a sofa, laughs uncontrollably. Now for the first time it occurs to him that both halves of Castle Bahrenberg are exactly alike to the very smallest detail, and that he has done nothing less than break into the Ohly silver closet.

It is delicious! Mignon had evidently heard the knocking, had opened the closet to investigate,

boldly stretched out her hand, and had been clutched by a cold, dreadful, ghostly hand.

Her cry of terror still rings through the dining-room. She is half fainting from fright. Her parents, Sven and the servants assemble before the terrible cupboard, and Cyprian presses his handkerchief to his lips, and returns to his post of eaves-dropping.

"It is nonsense, Mignon. Imagination!" says the baron. "How could there be ghosts here in broad daylight?"

"You knocked your hand against a glass dish," says his wife, soothingly.

"No, no, it was a hand. See the red marks here where it held me fast! Ah—my ring!"

"Your ring?"

"It is gone!"

"When you rose from the breakfast-table to go to the closet, I saw it on your finger."

"Certainly, it was on my hand. O heavens, the ghost has robbed me of my ring!" Strangely enough, Mignon's voice suddenly sounds quite different; it trembles as though with joy.

"Absurd! I hope no sensible people will be deceived by such a trick," says Sven's voice, crossly.

"Trick? I forbid such an expression."

"Mignon, Mignon, do not be so violent," says the baron, and Sven orders a light to be brought, and the closet to be explored.

"I really believe, my dear Sven, that you doubt Mignon's word." Florence, too, seems piqued.

"How could one expect a grown woman to relate

such nonsense ! I believe neither in ghostly hands nor ghosts themselves."

"Oh, indeed ! And yet you placed your happiness under the protection of our beneficent household spirit?" says Mignon, angrily. "If anything unusual happens to a 'grown woman' she can expect that one will not doubt her word like that of a lying school-child."

A light shines through the cracks of wood.

"Have the kindness to look yourself, cousin."

"Take out the silver."

"There is nothing to be seen. No trace of a ring."

"Look on the carpet. Look all over the room."

There is much hurrying to and fro. In vain ! The baroness sends the servants to search the terrace.

"It is lost trouble. I saw the ring on Mignon's finger a moment ago," says Sven, rudely and angrily. In his vexation he seems quite to forget himself. "If a ring is to disappear, one must look in dress pockets. Little girls have at times strange ideas of duty and fidelity."

"Outrageous, to insult my poor, nervous, half-sick child thus !"

"Oh, mamma, it is dreadful !" Mignon, sobbing, seems to throw herself into her mother's arms.

"What do you mean, Sven ? I beg you to explain your words."

"What do I mean ? Simply this : Miss Mignon changes lovers as she does dresses. And as she is tired of me, she plans a fine spirit scene to get rid of an objectionable ring."

“Shame on you!”

“A count with an inheritance of millions is certainly a more desirable suitor—”

“Yes, a thousand times more desirable, and far more agreeable to me, as well as to my daughter, than a furious, brutal, inconsiderate Sven von Gullenstrom.”

“Children, children, for Heaven’s sake be calm!” cried the baron, piteously.

“No, papa, let mamma speak. It will be a blessing to have the matter settled. I will not be insulted and called a liar. I forbid any one to treat me like a schoolgirl.”

“But, darling, Sven is jealous. That excuses everything, and you love him,” says the baron.

A short, passionate laugh.

“Love him? No, thank God, I do not love him and never have loved him.”

“Oh, delightful! You hear, dear uncle. She has only coquetted with me to spur on the count, that she may reject him a second time.”

“Reject him? Are you so sure?” cried Florence, with scornful triumph. “You have learned the difference now, have you not, darling, between a man who kisses a girl because he is passionately in love with her, and one who coarsely insults her with distrust and roughness.”

“Oh, mamma!”

Again loud sobs, but Sven says, cuttingly:

“May I ask for a carriage to take me to the railway station, uncle?”

Cyprian presses his hands to his temples. Yes,

a beneficent spirt certainly watches over this house. His eyes sparkle as they rest on the little ring in his hand. Dame Fortune has been on his side again. Now he will go to Mignon.

The Ohly family receive the captain with great excitement, and hastily tell him the inexplicable occurrence.

“Do you believe in such ghosts, count? I implore you; tell me frankly, do you believe that a hand could really seize Mignon’s here in this closed cupboard, and draw a ring from her finger?”

Cyprian controlled himself excellently. He looked very grave and thoughtful.

“To speak frankly, baroness, perhaps I should doubt the story if I heard it from any one’s lips but those of Mignon. But as your daughter relates it as a fact, there can exist no doubt in my mind, as my belief in Miss Mignon is such that her words are as reliable, to me, as the oath of a man.”

The girl’s eyes flash delight, love and gratitude. Those are different words from Sven’s. The count is taken to the cupboard, and all the details related to him. He seems deeply interested, tells of strange occurrences in Castle Neudeck, and lets himself be convinced by the ladies that inexplicable things do occur. He is horrified at Sven’s conduct, and the latter’s way of treating Mignon as a school-girl fairly enrages him.

Mignon’s eyes grow more and more bright, her flushed cheeks must encourage him to think that it needs but a word from him, and she would come to his arms, but he is silent.



CHAPTER XXV.

Princess Hermine is an infrequent guest, as well in the palace as in Sophienhof, and therefore, the lackeys in the latter were not a little surprised, when her tall figure suddenly appeared at the entrance, and asked if the Princess Rafaela were at home.

Upon being answered in the affirmative, she declared her intention of waiting upon her niece unannounced.

Rafaela sat at her writing desk, her head thoughtfully resting in one little hand; before her lay a newspaper, and her face wore a deeply pained look. When the *portières* parted she looked up.

“Oh, Aunt Hermine! Dear, good aunt! How kind of you to visit me!”

After embracing her tenderly, the princess loosened her wraps, and seated herself on a divan beside Rafaela. Her sharp eyes fell upon the writing desk.

“You have already read the latest news of the attack planned upon your heart?” she asks, quickly. “I came here for that reason. I have

spoken with neither you nor Henry for a long time, and should like to know, darling, how correct this article is. Do they really wish to marry you to Prince Archibald? How has this come about so suddenly?"

Rafaela sighed deeply, and wrung her hands as though in despair.

"Oh, Aunt Hermine, what unfortunate beings we princesses are, that the politics, wishes and desires of the country may hound us to death. Have I not already made the terrible sacrifice of giving myself to an unloved husband, that I might satisfy my people, and give them an heir to the throne? Now Carl Henry lives. Now I have borne a crown prince, and yet public opinion again demands a royal marriage of me."

"The succession to the throne depends upon one life only, my poor child. You know how easily a young life is endangered, and how, in one night, the brightest hopes may be blighted. The book, 'Madam Potiphar,' has made the people anxious, because your wish to marry Cyprian Lankwitz all too plainly is exposed in it—"

"But, dearest aunt, now when the riddle is solved—when it is learned that Cyprian himself wrote that book—"

The princess smiled so peculiarly that Rafaela paused in surprise and stared at her questioningly.

"Ah! Is it really then proved, directly *proved*, that the captain wrote the book?"

Rafaela changed color in alarm.

"Unquestionably! The handwriting of the

manuscript—his initials on the title-page,” she stammered.

“And are those proofs?” The princess drew several written pages from her pocket and unfolded them. “You are, as I hear from Henry, perfectly indifferent to Cyprian, so my communication will be interesting, not exciting to you,” and Hermine glanced searchingly at her niece’s colorless face. “You say the count’s initials, ‘C. L.,’ but those may also mean Cyril Lankwitz,” and the speaker glanced at the picture which lay where Rafaela, in her haste, had left it, on the writing-desk.

“Cyril?” cried the young princess. “Incredible! Impossible! Why would Cyril write such a book?”

With slightly trembling hands, Princess Hermine unfolded several pages, manuscript fragments of “Madam Potiphar,” and several letters.

“Here are letters of the father, here those of the son. At a superficial glance both handwritings are strikingly similar, but whoever has studied as many different handwritings as I have has a sharp eye for little differences. Here, look at this curve in the ‘G,’ and here in the ‘R’ and in the ‘V.’ They are exactly like Cyril’s, but not like Cyprian’s writing.”

Rafaela pressed her hands to her temples, and stared at the writing. Her face flushed crimson, her breath came quickly, and yet her eyes seemed to grow bright.

“Oh, Aunt Hermine, if you were right!” she murmured.

“The captain is a gay, charming society man,” continued Hermine, hastily, “but he is not the man

to write such a clever, satirical book. The thought that I had been mistaken in him made me investigate the matter. Cyprian never wrote 'Madam Potiphar.' The author is Count Cyril."

"Is Cyril!"

"Remember the time when this book appeared, Rafaela. At that time the young man was not your friend, but the reverse, your declared enemy, with whom you were in constant warfare. That book is Cyril's belief, his pessimistic, intolerant views. It was the overflow of years of unnaturally suppressed passion. In blind zeal he threw a stone, not suspecting how far it would roll."

"And you say that, Aunt Hermine? You accuse Cyril Lankwitz, your *protegé* and favorite?"

"Accuse? I have never understood why the author hid his identity behind a pseudonym. The book is not malicious or slanderous. It is a general, although too severe, criticism, like that of some fanatical clergyman. That it was felt here that you were described in the heroine, was due to the divided state of society then. Your enemies indiscreetly fancied they had found the kernel in the shell, and declared that all the characters were drawn from life. The clever book became a scandalous pamphlet. I do not accuse Cyril, but I find one thing to blame in him: that he continued in the society of a woman concerning whom his conscience must have troubled him, and yet lacked courage to bear the consequences of his act. And on account of this weakness I warn you, Rafaela, do not trust him too much. Perhaps he may

prove unworthy of this confidence. A man who is too cowardly to acknowledge his actions will never be a reliable friend and adviser. You know now, my dear child, what Cyril Lankwitz is, and I hope your eyes may read him plainly. And now, let me see little Carl Henry. I have a little Easter present for him. Let me go alone. I see you were busy here. Let all that we have said be our secret, and do not be angry with me for speaking so plainly, for I mean kindly by you."

The princess folded the papers and put them in her pocket again. Then she took Rafaela's pale face between her hands and kissed it.

Rafaela was alone.

Tears rushed to her eyes, and a feeling of despair overcame her. She had just been so happy, and now was so sad. That Cyril Lankwitz was the author of "*Madam Potiphar*," realized her secret dream of longing. For years she had known no more passionate desire than to meet the man who for the first time in her life had told her the truth, had roughly pulled her back from the false path upon which she had been wandering, and had been the cause of such true happiness to her. He had caused her the deepest and most unjust misery she had ever experienced. But when her first flush of indignation had subsided, and she read the book a second and a third time, the unknown author began to impress her. She felt the truth of what he said, and as, later, she realized what a benefit this book had been to her, she longed more and more to know the man who had so changed her life.



WHAT SHE WHISPERED TO HER THERE REMAINED A SECRET.—See Page 297.

And more and more did she connect the gloomy, misanthropical Cyril with this unknown. But gradually this idea became more vague, and Cyril's personality exercised its strange charm over her, for the very reason that it was so unlike her own.

When Cyprian Lankwitz proclaimed himself the author, a feeling of disappointment had come over her. He was not the man she had expected to find in the author of such a book. Her heart rejoiced at Princess Hermine's discovery, yes, he alone could be the pitiless but beneficial reformer of her nature. But why must this hateful shadow fall upon her ideal? Why had the proud, upright Cyril been so cowardly as to let his father take the responsibility, instead of boldly acknowledging the truth?

This petty fear of the consequences of his deed degraded him.

In bitter pain, Rafaela buries her face in her hands. Now that her ideal is proved faulty, she realizes for the first time how she loves him.

There are steps in the next room, a lackey enters and announces that Count Lankwitz urgently begs her highness for an interview.

"Which Lankwitz?"

"Count Cyril, your highness."

For a moment Rafaela grasps the back of a chair to steady herself, then drawing a deep breath, she says:

"I will receive him in the Murillo room."

She passes her handkerchief over her face; she is once more alone, as though to remove all traces of the last hour. Her heart cries out at the thought

that he comes to deceive her, but he shall not see the pain this will cause her.

Slowly, with bowed head, she goes to meet him ; and when she sees him for the first time since his illness, she starts violently.

The long weeks during which he was at death's door have left their traces on his face. But he is not only pale and ill, he looks wretchedly unhappy.

"Count Lankwitz ! Good heavens, why did you venture to drive here to-day?" says she, in alarm. "The doctors were not willing that you should go out for another week."

"I could bear it no longer your highness. I *had* to beg for this audience," he fairly gasped out, resting his hand on a small table.

Rafaela quickly motioned him to a chair.

"Sit down, first of all. Climbing the stairs has over-fatigued you. It was very foolish to rush so much to-day."

He sinks down in the chair like a broken-down old man, and gloomily stares before him.

"It was urgent, your highness, if my impatience and excitement were not to torture me to death. Remember that I have not seen you since—since the name of the author of 'Madam Potiphar' was in every one's mouth."

The princess had seated herself opposite him.

"You have surely learned that the duke as well as I pardon your father," says she, softly.

He raised his head abruptly.

"One has nothing to forgive an innocent man, your highness, but doubly and trebly him who

ascribes his fault to another, and tries to adorn himself with a false halo."

Rafaela trembled, but gazed at him with wide, open eyes.

"I do not understand," said she, faintly.

He seemed to fight a last, despairing struggle with himself. Then he raised his head and gazed into her eyes. His sunken cheeks flushed, and his lips quivered.

"Let me shorten this hour of torment, your highness. Let me begin my confession at the end," he cried excitedly. "I lied in cowardly accepting my father's offer to announce himself as the author of the most unfortunate of books. Not he but I wrote 'Madam Potiphar,' your highness, and may God and you forgive me." His head sank on his breast, and he continued precipitately: "I was already ill and irresponsible when my father took pity on me in my despair, and took the blame upon himself. I had not strength to acknowledge the truth before it was too late. I lay on my sick-bed and groaned in agony. My pride rebelled against the unworthy rôle I must now play before the world and in my own eyes, and if ever a man was tortured with shame and remorse it was I. No one is proof against temptation, but I had no time to resist. I do not beg forgiveness, your highness, for I do not deserve it. I only wish to be true, for I cannot appear a liar in your sight. I cannot. The horrible hour when my heart was weaker than my conscience seems like a dream to me. I trembled like a coward at thought of the hour when you would turn with

hatred from the author of 'Madam Potiphar.' I could die, but not lose your favor, your highness. I could not bear the thought, but still less can I bear to stand before you a liar. I know what this hour means for me," he continued dully. "I will go, for I no longer deserve my position in this house. I have no right to ask forgiveness, but I know that noble hearts condone crimes that are sincerely repented." He paused, without glancing at her.

She had listened in silence, not interrupting him by a sound, but her sweet face shone.

"Your crime! Did you really—hate me so that you could write a book like 'Madam Potiphar'?"

He started at her voice and stared at her like one in a dream. And what he read in her eyes made the blood rush to his head and heart. A kind of madness came over him.

"Hate!" he laughed shrilly. "No, I was not fortunate enough to hate the woman who poisoned my existence. Oh, then, all would have been well." He paused abruptly. Then continued passionately: "It is probably the last time I shall stand before your highness. I have been frank. I will be so to the end. Why did I write the most unfortunate of books? Not because I hated you, your highness, but loved you—loved you to madness. I suffered all the torments of jealousy. My heart cried out for vengeance and means of separating you from my father seemed right. I did not consider, but acted. And when my manuscript was in the hands of the Frenchmen I was the helpless tool of their speculation. The result was far beyond my expect-

tations. I despised myself, but my passion triumphed. He paused, out of breath, and sank back in his chair, his eyes fixed despairingly upon her.

Rafaela buried her face in her handkerchief, and sobbed softly. Her dark curls fell over her crimson forehead.

“So it was with me until the hour when you wept, Rafaela, wept as now,” he continued, in a trembling voice, “until your words to Duke Henry, which I overheard in the next room, opened my eyes. Then I realized how bitterly I had wronged you. The sky seemed to fall. No words can describe what I suffered then. Henceforth I knew but one duty—to heal the wounds I had inflicted. My own work became my tormentor, and the fear of discovery, the angel with the fiery sword, who drove me from the Paradise, where rest and peace awaited me—until to-day— Now it is all over.” His voice died away.

“Cyril!”

A soft, trembling cry of happiness. In overpowering emotion Rafaela stretched out both hands to him. He stared into her eyes as though it were some incomprehensible, sweet wonder. Then he sank down before her, and silently pressed his face against her hands. His form shook, and his lips burned on her white fingers. He tried to speak, but could not.

“Cyril!” she whispered again and again, “Cyril!”

There was a slight noise behind them. Both started up and gazed at Princess Hermine’s pale, excited face.

“I come from Carl Henry,” she whispered, her

voice choked with tears. "Two hours ago the child was taken very ill."

Rafaela sprang up with a cry of alarm.

"Impossible! I was with him the whole morning!" she cried, confusedly.

"The fever came on very suddenly, and from its intensity seems to forbode some serious illness."

Rafaela's face turned deathly pale. She looked neither to the right nor the left, but rushed to her child. Everything seemed to dance before Cyril's eyes. His hands grasped a chair-back, but Princess Hermine laid her cool hands on them.

"I came at the right time, my poor young friend. Do you not know that one may long for the stars in Heaven, but can never attain them? The succession to the throne depends upon Carl Henry's delicate young life, which may be a prey to death in a few hours. Rafaela cannot marry for love. Count Cyril, alas, she *cannot*. If you are a true friend of your prince's house, a brave son of your fatherland, be strong. Let your duty be stronger than your love, and leave the capital."

For a moment Cyril stared at her in a daze. Then he stooped and kissed the princess's hand.

"I know what I owe to my sovereign and fatherland, your highness," said he dully, "and will make the greatest sacrifice a human heart can make. I go, your highness."

"God bless you, my poor, brave friend."

His steps die away, and the room into which the sun had just been shining, lay dark and deserted as the grave of happiness.



CHAPTER XXVI.

Princess Hermine went at once to the palace, and seeking her nephew, she told him what she had seen and heard.

Her face was very sad as she finished, and she sighed.

"Heaven knows whether I have done rightly in separating the two poor young things," said she. "It was very hard for me, for seldom have I felt that two young people, despite their unlikeness, were so suited to each other as Rafaela and Cyril. But I was brought up with strict ideas of the duty of a princess. I followed a sudden impulse when I acted, Henry; but I come here to place the definite decision in your hands. You can decide as you think best. I have done my duty."

Duke Henry had listened with the deepest interest. His face shone with pleasure, he arose and paced the room. When the speaker paused, he stopped before her.

"I thank you, Aunt Hermine, thank you with all my heart," said he, hastily. "You have acted perfectly right, for as matters appeared to you, it was

of the utmost importance that Rafaela should make a royal marriage, but that is no longer necessary," and stooping over Princess Hermine, he whispered a few words in her ear.

"Henry! Good heavens, is it possible?"

He nodded, his voice suffocated with excitement.

"Yes, Aunt Hermine, it is the truth. Seek Renée, and tell her joy has made me talkative. Tell her the reasons. I will at once go to the hospital, and make sure of that irresponsible hothead, Cyril. His mood promises the rashest acts, and he must and shall live for my poor little sister. Rafaela has suffered enough. Oh, Aunt Hermine, I shall always think of the hour when I saw the poor child stand at Carl Gustav's side, before the altar. I seemed the executioner of her happiness, and prayed that an hour might come when I could give back to Rafaela what I took from her that day. This hour has now come, and although it was a hard path these two had to travel before they found each other, I believe every step has been a foundation stone for their true happiness."

Duke Henry drove at once to the hospital, and alighted in person to speak with young Count Lankwitz. The head nurse was inconsolable. Against her strict orders, the count had left his room and driven to Sophienhof. The exertion had naturally been too great, and a half-hour before, the count had returned, only to have a relapse. He was delirious again, and the nurse was putting him to bed.

The duke seemed very anxious. He recommended the patient to their especial care, and with

unusual excitement, impressed upon the nurse never to leave him alone for an instant. Then he hurried back to his carriage, and drove to Sophienhof, to inquire for Carl Henry.

He found Rafaela at the little prince's bedside. The child breathed more regularly, although still feverish, and was asleep. Rafaela, too, slept in the armchair at his side. Her face was pale, her eyes red from weeping, and her head had fallen forward on her breast, like a broken lily.

Deeply moved, the duke withdrew.

In a few days the little prince was quite himself again, but Count Cyril suffered greatly from his relapse, and it was late in the spring when the duke could summon him to a private audience.

Princess Rafaela had shut herself up in Sophienhof from all the world. Her brother smiled and made no objections, that the surprise he had in store for her might be the more complete and delightful. His wife and aunt were also sworn to secrecy.

Thus, while Count Cyril stood before his duke and heard such sweet, incomprehensible news that he fancied heaven had opened before him, Duchess Renée drove to Sophienhof and surprised her charming sister-in-law in the orange-garden.

Rafaela hastily pressed her handkerchief to her eyes to dry a few traitorous drops, and her mournful face contrasted strangely with the duchess's radiant look, as she drew the young princess tenderly down on the marble bench beside her. What she whispered to her there in the garden remained a secret to all others save the orange blossoms for

some time, but Rafaela's half suppressed cry of joy rang out in the May air.

The princess sat there as though under a spell, after Renée had left her. She leaned her head back and closed her eyes as though in a happy dream, a very vision of loveliness in her white gown.

The gravel crunched, and Rafaela started up. Duke Henry approached, smiling, leading Count Cyril by the hand, and said roguishly to his sister:

"See, darling, here is a poor invalid, whom no mere medicine can cure, for the disease is too deeply rooted in his heart. You are so clever, and have such skillful little hands, perhaps you may know a remedy."

What he said neither of the two noticed or heard. They stood and gazed into each other's eyes in speechless rapture.

Then they were alone, and the orange blossoms strewed their white petals upon them. Hand clasped hand, lips meet lips, and they belong to each other for all eternity.

* * * * *

The surprising news of Cyril's betrothal was telegraphed to Bahrenberg, and Baroness Ohly gave her husband a most meaning glance. Even the baron, who had rather opposed Valleral as a son-in-law, felt that further opposition would be foolish, especially since Sven's retreat.

Cyprian's trunks were packed, for he must return to the capital at once, to tender his congratulations. Mignon's rosy face was somewhat paler than usual,

as she sat at breakfast near the gay, talkative captain. And she soon rose from the table and hurried down the steps of the terrace into the park, which was in all the blossoming splendor of spring.

Cyprian exchanged a few words with the baroness, then rose also, and slowly followed her in the bright sunshine.

He found her at some distance, sitting on a little bench, where blooming hawthorn boughs bent down over her. Softly he advanced. Her golden braids hung down her back. He seized them, and teasingly pulled them.

She started up and stared at him. Then the tears fell faster down her cheeks.

“Mignon, my horses are waiting. I must go.”

She held her hand out to him with averted face.

“Good-by !” she sobbed.

“Are you still angry with me, Mignon?”

She silently shook her blonde head.

“Have you forgiven me all?”

She nodded.

“Even the kiss?”

At first she hesitated, then made an indefinable movement which might mean yes or no. But Valeral took it as yes.

“Excellent ! Then all is finely settled. Now be sensible, little mouse, and look at me.”

Such disrespectful language was unheard of. Involuntarily she glanced up into his gay, laughing face, and before she realized it he kissed her again.

She is so breathless with fright that she cannot speak. Then he draws her to his breast, gazes

merrily into her eyes and asks, without a trace of solemnity:

"Little one, will you really not be my dear little love? I cannot declaim as finely as Cousin Sven, but my heart beats more truly. Mignon, sweet little darling, will you have me?"

She laughs through her tears, throws her arms around his neck and presses her face to his breast. Valleral's love-making was champagne foam quite as before, but Mignon understood how to appreciate it now, and had acquired a taste for it. Arm in arm, radiant with happiness, they stroll toward the castle.

"We will arrange our new kingdom within four walls as a pattern for the future state, with the strictest consideration of the woman question," says he, teasingly.

"Of course. Perfect equality," laughs she.

"Universal suffrage."

"Really? May I vote?"

"Yes, but then you will have to pay very high taxes."

"In coin of the realm?"

"Yes—so—in coin of the realm!" and he takes her head between his hands and kisses her repeatedly.

"But then only quarterly!" says she, when she has recovered her breath.

"No. Whoever wishes to decide everything, as you do, must pay permanently."

They are so happy. They can scarcely believe so much happiness can exist on this earth. Suddenly Cyprian looks at his watch.

“We have a half-hour’s time and mamma will not expect us before,” says he, becoming graver. “Will you do me a favor, dear?”

Her radiant eyes consent.

“Come with me to Aunt Claudine’s grave,” says he, softly. “I feel as though she must take an especial interest in our happiness, and as God’s angels are spirits of peace, doubtless she looks down upon us and blesses us, since I return her inheritance to the hands which have the most just claim to it.”

Mignon gazes at him in delight. Now, for the first time, her heart thrills with the most perfect happiness. Cyprian cannot only laugh and jest, he can be grave and serious also. But he does not show these feelings to the great crowd; only to those who will understand them.

With trembling hands she picks a bunch of fragrant blossoms, and then, he with his arm around her, they go to the quiet, green mound, to ask from the dead the first blessing upon their love.

No more unequal pair ever stood side by side, and yet love has united them in true and perfect harmony.

When they returned to the castle, Mignon was not a little surprised to see two travelling carriages before the entrance.

Baroness Ohly came to meet them in a handsome travelling costume, and the servants were bringing two trunks down the stairs in great haste.

Mignon rushed into her mother’s arms, her face like a rose.

“Mamma—oh, dear, darling mamma—”

Florence greeted them with a mixture of emotion and the greatest satisfaction.

"Well, children, it was the highest time that you came to an agreement. We must be at the railway station in half an hour," said she dryly.

"Oh, mamma, I am so very happy!"

"Indeed! Well, you might have been so some time before. By the way, Mr. Son-in-law, who would be with me in ten minutes, eh?"

Cyprian kissed her little hand and looked mischievous.

"Mother-in-law, do you not know that the way to—Hades is paved with good intentions?"

Florence draws a breath of relief. She had feared that love would make Valleral tiresome. When the baron appeared, he found his family affairs in the best of order.

"And we are going back to the capital at once, mamma?" cries Mignon, joyously.

"Of course. Did you think I would miss Cyril's betrothal? She laughed merrily. "I must see how my little girl behaves as future mother-in-law of a princess."

Valleral's engagement made a great sensation, and many predicted that such a dissimilar couple would never be happy together. But how greatly they were mistaken the future proved, for seldom has the capital witnessed a more happy marriage than Valleral's.

When autumn's foliage was gayest, the thunder of cannon announced to the land that a princess had been born to the ducal pair. Rafaela stood god-

mother for the little heiress to the throne, her heart throbbing with happiness, and three days later she stood before the altar at the side of her lover. It was a quiet ceremony, limited to the most intimate court circle, but never did the sun shine more brightly through the chapel windows than on this day. Duke Henry could not take his eyes from the bride's lovely face. To-day no sadness came over him. He thought of former times, and thanked Heaven.

Cyril and Rafaela have lived for years in world-forgetful happiness in Castle Soldau, and Duchess Renée once asked thoughtfully :

“How is it possible that Rafaela's first marriage should have been so sad, and her second so perfectly happy?”

The duke answered smilingly :

“Why? Only in love can unlike mate with unlike.”

THE END.

A War Novel.

THE GUN-BEARER.

BY

EDWARD A. ROBINSON

AND

GEORGE A. WALL,

Authors of "The Disk," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES FAGAN.

12mo. 276 Pages. Handsomely Bound in Cloth. Price, \$1.25.
Paper Cover, 50 Cents.

A new and thrilling war novel of intense interest, narrating the experiences of a *private soldier* whose regiment joins Sherman's army at Buzzard's Roost, and shares the fortunes of that army, participating in all the engagements up to the fall of Atlanta. Thence with General Schofield's command, pursued by General Hood into Tennessee, contesting the ground foot by foot, the regiment finally joins General Thomas at Nashville. The story culminates with the desperate battle of Franklin, where General Schofield, with ten thousand men, wrestled with General Hood and three times as many Confederates. Vivid descriptions of soldier life in camp, on the march, in bivouac, on picket, in skirmish and in battle, sustain the interest and hold the reader's attention to the end.

For sale by all booksellers and newsdealers, or sent, postpaid, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

705

ROBERT BONNER'S SONS,

COR. WILLIAM AND SPRUCE STREETS, NEW YORK.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00014814723

